

POINT OF CONSUMPTION:
WORK, CONSCIOUSNESS AND ORGANIZING IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2013

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the
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Abstract

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The decline of the American labor movement is a well-known phenomenon. Of its most salient causes, globalization, employer resistance and union bureaucratization have been thoroughly investigated. But the ascendance of service work—a fourth oft-cited cause—has not. Specifically, the internal dynamics of private-sector services have not been sufficiently examined as a possible explanation for union decline. This study derives a series of hypotheses from the sociology of service work, labor process and union revitalization literatures, and then explores them through three qualitative case studies of work and organizing in America’s largest low-wage service industry: retail trade. Two cases—Macy’s and Target stores in New York City—are compared to assess the structure and trajectory of contemporary dynamics in the low-wage service workplace, and a third—the Retail Action Project (RAP), an innovative workers’ center in the same city—is used to assess three strategies for service worker organizing. Data consist of more than 80 in-depth interviews with frontline workers, managers, RAP members and officials as well as documentary analysis and participant observation. At Macy’s, I find that an adversarial model of work organization engenders opposition and union receptivity among workers, while Target’s team-based consensus model—based on a deskilled labor process and explicit anti-union initiatives—mitigates the emergence of similar attitudes among its workforce. Age and job tenure, however, are decisive factors at both stores, with Target employing a higher proportion of younger and Caribbean workers than Macy’s. Analysis of the Retail Action Project displays the limitations of organizing large retail firms on a local basis, but also the promise of open-membership models for the future of service worker unionism.

Acknowledgements

This project, which has been more than three years in the making, has incurred many debts along the way. I would like to thank my advisor, Ruth Milkman, for her tireless support at every stage of the process, her thorough yet always constructive criticism and her encyclopedic knowledge of the work and industrial relations literature—without which this study would have been much less complete, though any remaining faults are my own. Stanley Aronowitz and Philip Kasinitz provided theoretical and practical guidance from start to finish, Gerald Sider alerted me to the multiple layers of power under capitalism and the complexity of workers’ stories, while David Monaghan was always willing to discuss ideas and provided regular encouragement. Perhaps most crucially, I owe a great debt to the dozens of workers who participated in this study and whose voices constitute the bulk of the narrative. Last but not least, I want to thank my partner, Katja, for her love, patience and support throughout my years as a graduate student.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This study starts with a strike—almost. On June 16th, 2011, over 4,000 workers at four New York Macy’s stores came within hours of walking off the job. It would have been the first work stoppage at the company since 1972. Instead, in the wee hours of the morning representatives of Local 1-S of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) agreed to a tentative five-year deal based on a 65-cent raise and called off the strike. One day later, workers at a nearby Target store in Long Island cast ballots in a widely-watched unionization drive. Like most such elections recently, it failed. Hopes for a beachhead of unionism in the big-box retail sector were dashed, at least temporarily.

Alongside fast-food, retail is among the most recognizable low-wage industries in 21st century America. Walmart is now the world’s largest private employer and because of this, “it is hard to imagine a revitalized and powerful labor movement in the U.S. without a unionized Wal-Mart”—or retail sector, for that matter (Moody 2007a, 234). The failure of unionization at Target—Walmart’s largest competitor—seems only to emphasize the difficulties of realizing such revitalization. But as the case of Macy’s shows, it wasn’t always like this. In New York at least, department store workers had once been well organized into effective trade unions; similar cases of once-powerful waitress unions in cities across the country also point not only to the willingness, but the ability of frontline service workers to organize and collectively further their interests when given favorable circumstances (Cobble 1991a). Both in retail and in restaurants unions were established through the use of direct action—sit-down strikes and mass picketing—in the context of U.S. labor’s greatest upsurge (Opler 2007). Industrial unionism in retail, however, never attained the national density of its counterparts in mass production industries and throughout the post-war boom, retailers employed a variety of tactics to mitigate union strength

(*ibid*; Ziskind 2003). Though hold-outs remain, unions have been unable to make any significant advances in retail, or other low-wage services, since the 1970s. Today, they face a brave new world of nationally integrated big-box firms and with them, a tidal wave of ‘flexible’ work arrangements and austere wages and benefits.

Occurring so close in space and time, the events of June 2011 appeared to symbolize the twin dilemmas of the American labor movement: cautious conservatism in its remaining areas of strength and a frustrating inability to gain traction in new ones. But the crisis of American labor is hardly new. While the slide in working class power that began after Reagan’s 1981 crushing of the PATCO strike is well known, stagnation was evident long before, with some even pointing to the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947. On this account, it would seem America’s industrial unions, if not their older AFL counterparts, began to die only shortly after their birth. The tragedy of American labor, when compared to its European counterparts, consists precisely in this belated birth, limited achievements, and early decline.

The present study is not a grandiose tale; it does not seek to re-assess the macro-historical causes of U.S. labor’s great anomalies, most of which have been duly discussed elsewhere (e.g. Sombart 1976 [1906]; Perlman 1928; Davis 1986). Instead, it focuses on one important and understudied aspect of U.S. labor’s failure in the post-Fordist era: its lack of growth among low-wage service workers. For in close correspondence to the decline of unionism is the diminishing proportion of what the Bureau of Labor Statistics calls “goods-producing” workers. Is this merely coincidence? Or is there something intrinsic about contemporary, low-wage services that inhibit worker opposition, militancy and the chances for effective unionism? This study interrogates these issues, posed as the following four research questions:

- 1) How have service labor processes been transformed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries? Are there identifiable patterns that mirror past changes in the organization of factory work?
- 2) What are the current structures and dynamics of low-wage service work?
- 3) To what extent do these changes and structures shape workers' class consciousness and willingness to unionize?
- 4) What are the most effective strategies for organizing contemporary low-wage service workers?

In what follows I first derive hypotheses to each of these questions through a careful review of the literature from labor process theory, the sociology of service work and the interdisciplinary debate over union revitalization. This discussion unfolds in three parts, pertaining to the three fields of literature. In the first, I delineate theories of workplace change and the impact of workplace dynamics in general on workers' class consciousness and union receptivity; second, I consider the wealth of research on service work to identify seven ways in which such labor processes may diverge from this general model with respect to creating or mitigating class consciousness; third, I consider three prominent strategies for union renewal and their utility for organizing low-wage service workers. After this, I describe my methodology, which is qualitative in nature and consists of three strategically chosen cases in New York City; lastly, I provide an overview of the present work before proceeding to my substantive analysis.

Work and Consciousness

The labor process debate that energized studies of work throughout the 1970s and 80s has largely subsided, settling into what one recent analyst, referencing Adler (2007), calls a state of

“paleo-paralysis” (Vallas 2007). While some of this decline can be attributed to sheer exhaustion among many of the protagonists, a good portion is likely due to the waning significance of manufacturing as a sector of employment in advanced capitalist nations, with this field of work having provided the primary empirical battleground. Nonetheless, these discussions—comprising what is referred to as “labor process theory”—identified various trajectories of workplace change and helped refine our analytic concepts pertaining to work and workplace relations.

Braverman’s (1974) account is typically taken as the primary formulation of the deskilling hypothesis. Centrally focused on 20th-century changes in manufacturing (though with significant application to clerical trades), he argued that “the worker, systematically robbed of a craft heritage, is given little or nothing to take its place” (*ibid*, 5). The mechanism behind such degradation was not technological change or ‘rationalization’ *per se* (as per Kerr *et al.* 1960; Blauner 1964), but capitalist relations of production: “the manner in which labor processes are organized and carried out, is the ‘product’ of the social relations we know as capitalist” (*ibid*, 15). Braverman saw Taylorism, the managerial method named after Frederick Winslow Taylor, as the definitive expression of the capitalist imperative to increase control over workers through methodical observation, knowledge transfer (from worker to management), subdivision and routinization of tasks, culminating in a significant erosion of skill, or *deskilling*.

Later theorists sympathetic to Braverman’s approach emphasized the roles of worker consciousness and organization (e.g. Montgomery 1979; Edwards 1979) in resisting this downward trajectory, with Edwards (1979) and Burawoy (1979) identifying alternate managerial strategies such as bureaucratization and “good sportsmanship” (Stinchcombe 1990, 297, in reference to Burawoy 1979). Taylorism, on such formulations, was not the epitome of capitalist work rationality, but merely one and not entirely successful mode, with Fordism, welfarism and

human resource management providing at times superior means for enforcing control and eliciting consent. This theory of workplace change, in accordance with the title of Edwards' influential book, might be called the *contestation* model, whereby the impulse to deskill exists on the part of managers and capitalists, but as a *tendency* that can be counteracted rather than an inexorable process as Braverman's account appears to suggest.

A third group of theorists in the mid- to late-1980s, however, began to raise doubts about the underlying validity of the deskilling hypothesis. Wood (1987) and Attewell (1987) debated whether degradation as a general trajectory could ever be empirically verified and Attewell (1990) later took issue with the very concept of skill, arguing that it was so shot through with subjective criteria as to be of little value to the objective study of work. Seeing no clear direction in historical patterns of workplace change, these researchers' proposals have been appropriately referred to as a "contingency theory of labor process change" (Tomaskovik-Devey and Risman 1993).

Yet a fourth group of theorists both pre- and post-Braverman have asserted the opposite of deskilling—namely, skill *upgrading* (e.g. Adler 2007; Diprete 1988). The proposed mechanisms behind this trajectory are more heterogeneous than those of deskilling or contestation theorists, who typically implicated capitalist work relations: while Blauner (1964), Gorz (1964) and Bell (1973) saw technological change as the key driver of increased skill, Sabel (1982), Piore and Sabel (1984) and other post-Fordists (e.g. Florida 2002) favored macro-level shifts in the normative structure of industrial relations, while enthusiasts of Japanese-style lean manufacturing emphasized the role of enlightened, 'participatory' management that sought "high performance workplaces" (Whitfield 2000; see also Ohno 1988; Krafcik 1988; Womack and Jones 2003). Though this latter variant has had its share of critics (e.g. Dohse *et al.* 1985;

Milkman 1991; Graham 1995; Moody 1997), both it and upgrading theory generally still exercise strong influence over scholarly and popular perceptions of workplace change.

These four approaches to the question of work transformation provide four hypothetical answers to the first research question. Braverman's deskilling account leads us to expect a degradation of skill; Edwards, Montgomery's and Burawoy predict a contested outcome determined by struggle between workers and managers; Wood and Attewell foresee no clear pattern of change, or ones that vary between workplaces, firms and industries; and Blauner, Bell, Sabel and Florida expect an upgrading or enrichment of service occupations. But to approach the second question regarding the dynamics of work, more refined concepts of skill and work relations are required.

Labor process theorists often distinguish between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" dimensions of work (Kalleberg 1977; Littler 1982; Mottaz 1985; Vallas 1987). The intrinsic include the degree of managerial control and the complexity of work tasks (Braverman 1974; Edwards 1979; Spenner 1983; Vallas 1987). I add to this the dimension of workforce collectivization—the degree to which task completion involves a complex division of labor and numeric concentration of workers—for a tripartite conception of intrinsic labor process aspects. Extrinsic components include pay, benefits and job security, managerial style (authoritarian or supportive), and working conditions (adverse/dangerous or pleasant/safe) (Vallas 1987). This yields a three-part conception of extrinsic labor-process aspects.

Beyond the labor process itself, though in close connection with it, are also the values and expectations workers bring with them (see e.g. Kalleberg 1977). While these are ultimately as numerous as the individuals involved and may change over time for the same person, they can be divided into two general categories based on the identification of "dual" or "segmented" labor

markets: primary vs. secondary expectations (Edwards 1979; Gordon *et al.* 1982; Gordon 1996). Primary job seekers depend on their wages as a crucial source of income either for themselves or others (e.g. family members), without which basic necessities such as housing, food, childcare or healthcare would not be accessible. Secondary job seekers do not require wages to meet such basic needs, having them covered by family members, pensions or various forms of public assistance, and instead work for discretionary income or simply the experience. Significant gray area clearly exists between these two ideal-type positions; nonetheless, they serve as useful reference points for understanding the material expectations of differently situated workers.

For investigation of the second research question, a tripartite model of workplace dynamics thus presents itself, consisting of intrinsic (autonomy, complexity, collectivization), extrinsic (pay/security, working conditions, managerial style) and worker characteristics (primary vs. secondary). The third research question, however, pertains to the impact of these dynamics on service workers' consciousness, specifically their *class* consciousness. To unpack this concept, I briefly consider a wealth of Marxian theoretical work that partially overlaps but significantly predates labor process theory.

In its original formulation, working class consciousness has an objective referent: it is consciousness *of* a relationship of surplus value. But two immediate questions arise: 1) Who is the subject of this consciousness—individual workers, the working class as a whole, or some intermediate group? 2) How does this subject (or these subjects) become conscious? Does it (or they) go through identifiable stages?

To the first question, three primary responses and corresponding methods of analysis exist. First is the class-totality perspective of classical Marxism, favoring a macro-historical approach (e.g. Marx 1913 [1852]; Lukács 1970 [1921]; Perlman 1928; Preis 1964; Davis 1999);

second is the methodologically individualist approach embodied in quantitative, survey-based studies (Centers 1949; Leggett 1968; Goldthorpe *et al.* 1969; Wright 1979, 1985; Vallas 1987); and third is the interactional perspective found in ethnographic labor-movement research (Gouldner 1954; Burawoy 1979; Fantasia 1988; Lopez 2004; Ness 2005; Milkman 2006).¹

Purveyors of these last two approaches, though employing different methods and foci of analysis than classical Marxists, rarely claim to examine fundamentally different subjects (see Wright 1985, 242-50 for a partial exception); instead, when situated theoretically, ethnographic and survey-based accounts provide partial windows onto a class-totality perspective—and necessary fine-grained complements to Marxian macro-histories (Ollman 1972; Dunk 1994, 2002).

As to the second question regarding stages of consciousness, the most influential theory is that of Mann (1973) who identifies a four-stage trajectory: from class identity, to class opposition, to class totality and finally to the view of an alternative society, or what some call “workers’ control” or “revolutionary class consciousness” (Giddens 1980; Montgomery 1979; Zingraff and Schulman 1984; Vallas 1987; Jones 2001). “Class identity” is essentially recognition of one’s value creation in the employment context and a common interest with other wage workers; it thus decomposes into two elements: *occupational identity*—identity with the set of tasks one performs—and *coworker solidarity*—affinity with one’s fellow workers. “Opposition,” the second of Mann’s categories, is the perception that owners’ and managers’ interests are contrary to one’s own and those of fellow workers; “totality” is the perception that similar relationships predominate in society; and the “view of an alternative society” that a non-exploitative mode of production is possible (Mann 1973, 13). A missing though often implied prelude to this trajectory, however, is dissatisfaction. As a basic recognition that something is

¹ A similar fine-grained approach is found in the social history tradition, exemplified by Thompson (1963), Gutman (1966), Dublin (1979), Fraser (1993) and Freeman (1989, 2000).

amiss in the structure of work relations, dissatisfaction provides motivation for change and a breeding ground for opposition (Zalesny 1985; Wheeler and McClendon 1991). If dissatisfaction is added and class identity split, as proposed, into occupational identity and coworker solidarity, this yields a six-stage schema of class consciousness, derived from Mann's four-part trajectory.

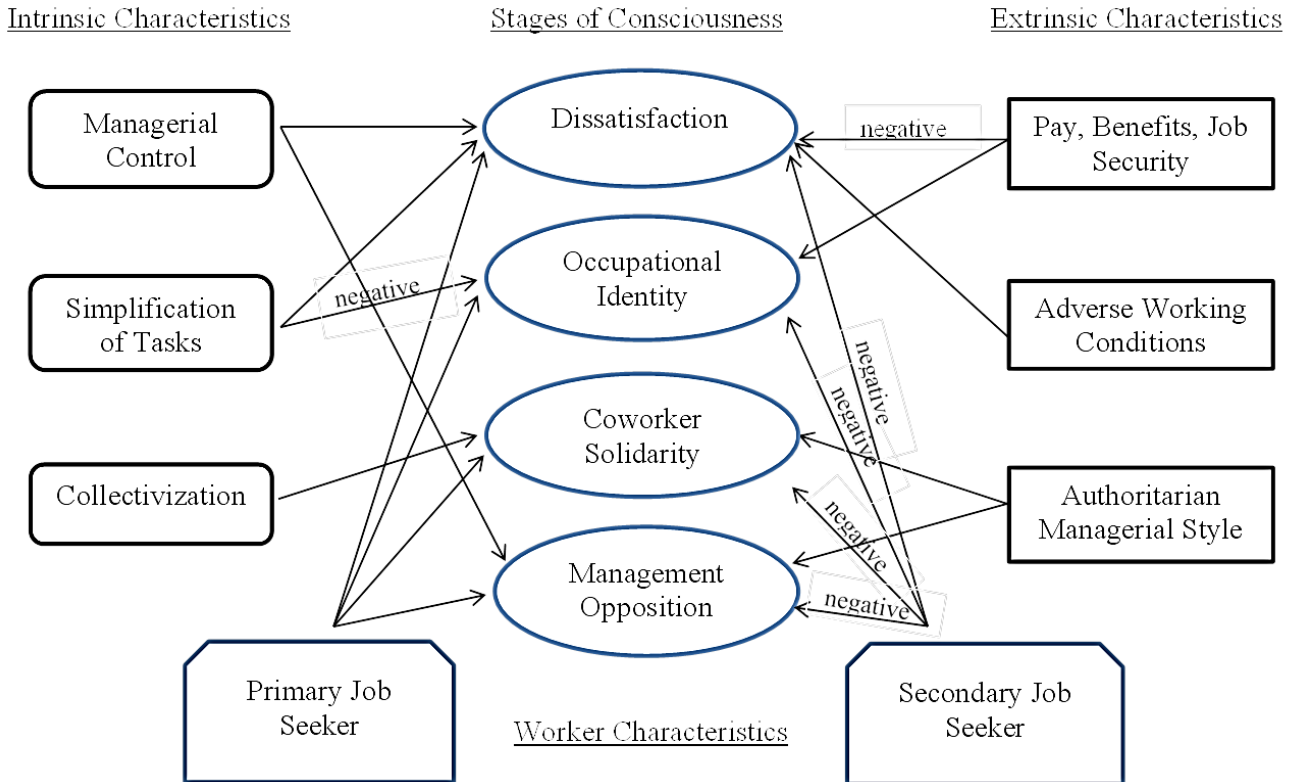
As the potential site of surplus value extraction, work should be central to the production of class consciousness.² But evidence points to the inability of workplace experience to engender all six stages, with a limit typically reached somewhere between opposition and totality (Mann 1973; Burawoy 1979, 1985; Katznelson 1982; Stinchcombe 1990, 274-87). Personal and culturally-determined expectations are vital mediators in the interpretation of work experience (Thompson 1963; Zingraff and Schulman 1984; Stinchcombe 1990, 288-94), alongside community life, political involvement or exclusion and the presence or absence of social movements (Piven and Cloward 1979). The present study therefore focuses on the first four stages of what might be called *workplace-based* (as distinct from Giddens' more robust "revolutionary") class consciousness: dissatisfaction, occupational identity, coworker solidarity and management opposition. These four aspects, when present, are thought to engender a willingness to organize among workers, or what Lenin once called "trade union consciousness" (1975 [1902], 24); this—union receptivity—is conceived as a fifth, composite category.

Combining these various elements, I identify expected relationships, as depicted in the diagram below. Labor process and worker characteristics are defined in unidirectional terms to aid exposition. Except where stated ('negative'), arrows indicate positive causation. Rigid

² It is highly debatable, of course, whether retail and many other service industries actually produce surplus value or simply enable its realization (see e.g. Hunt 1979; Moseley 1983; Cockschoff and Zachariah 2006). Marx's repeated insistence on the productive function of transportation and warehousing—of which retail, especially in its corporate incarnation, forms a part—and the distinction he draws between retail and "commercial" profit in *Capital* Volume III (the latter of which he deems wholly derivative of industrial profit) are intriguing on this point: "Assuming that all other circumstances are the same, the relative size of commercial capital (though *retail traders*, a hybrid species, form an exception) will be in inverse proportion to the speed of its turnover..." (1981, 400; emphasis added).

relations of causation, however, are tenuous at best and highly dependent on the measurement of each aspect in concrete work environments. The diagram therefore serves as a heuristic device which can be summed up in three hypotheses pertaining to intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics.

Figure 1.1: A model of the labor process – class consciousness relationship



1. Increased managerial control, task simplification and collectivization should engender dissatisfaction, management opposition, a decline in occupational identity and an increase in coworker solidarity, respectively, net of other factors.

2. Increased pay and job security, more adverse working conditions and authoritarian patterns of supervision should have contradictory effects on dissatisfaction, drive an increase in occupational identity (in the first case) and increases in solidarity and opposition (in the third).

3. The labor market status of being a “primary” job seeker (or job holder) should serve to augment the impact of both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects on the first three elements of class consciousness, while “secondary” status should have an opposite, mitigating effect.

These claims provide a general model of the impact of work on workers’ class consciousness. But they are derived primarily from studies of manufacturing, where surplus value is embodied in a physical commodity and the relationship between managers and workers is dyadic, displaying at least latent tendencies for opposition. The labor processes that now predominate in advanced capitalist countries no longer exhibit such clear-cut attributes.

The Dynamics of Services

The novelty of “service-providing” as against “goods-producing” work consists in the presence of a third party and the (alleged) immateriality of the product (Gutek 1995).³ Factors deriving from these intrinsic differences may obscure the relationship of surplus value, if strictly present at all (in public-sector or non-profit contexts). Extrinsic factors may also complicate matters, but as will be seen, theories of service work’s subjective effects are not uniformly negative with regard to class consciousness.

Emotional labor and ‘branded’ work identities have been linked to self-alienation and a loss of authenticity among workers (Hochschild 1983; Wharton 1993; Bolton and Houlihan 2005). This implies a mitigation of occupational identity, since the autonomous creation of value is partially obscured (Du Gay 1996; Pettinger 2004; Sloan 2007). Moreover, heightened identity with firm or brand in service contexts may inculcate “vertical solidarity” between workers and employers, thereby deflating opposition (Jacoby 1997; Smith 2011).

³ The cases of retail and food service are partial exceptions to the immateriality claim, since the final products—even if not physically transformed—are concrete objects.

At a more pragmatic level, smaller service workplaces with less collectivization, “short[er] hierarchies” and “fewer categorical labor contracts” than the classic Fordist factory are also predicted to inhibit the emergence of widespread coworker solidarity (Stinchcombe 1990, 306-7; Goldfield 1987, 149).

Gendered job norms are more ambiguous in their effects. “Caring labor” performed by service workers is often construed by employers as a natural extension of “feminine” duties (England 1992; Guy and Newman 2004). To the extent this ideology is effective, it may hinder occupational identity and management opposition (MacDonald and Merrill 2009, 116). But where not effective, and combined with conspicuously low wages, such “special oppression” can produce an oppositional gender consciousness (Benson 1986; Milkman 1987; Cobble 1991a; Paules 1991). Hartmann (1981) claims that gendered caring norms should in fact augment class consciousness when workers seek to defend meaningful client relationships against management attempts at speed-up; Hochschild (1983) and Jones (2001) find evidence to support this claim. The gendered character of much service work thus generates conflicting hypotheses about the production of class consciousness (Kerfoot and Korczynski 2005).

Some commentators argue that triadic workplace structures in “customer oriented bureaucracies” may modify the impact of work on consciousness (Korczynski 2002, 2008; Bolton and Houlihan 2010; Lopez 2010). Customers, patients or clients, though a possible source of human connection and solidarity, regularly pose problems for service workers. Leidner (1993, 1996) finds that some service workers value management protocols as a means of dealing with unruly customers; to the extent workers ally with management against third-party clients, this should mitigate opposition. On the employers’ side, securing service labor power requires greater emphasis on consent than in manufacturing (Edwards 1979; Hochschild 1983; Benson 1986;

Jacoby 1997, 95-141). Where a “Positive Mental Attitude” (Leidner 1993, 88) is required to perform work tasks, authoritarian managerial styles may be less effective than supportive, human-resource techniques (Korczynski 2002; Anderson 2006) and such ‘soft’ management techniques should be less conducive to dissatisfaction and opposition.

As to extrinsic aspects, low pay and security are characteristic of many service sector jobs (Appelbaum *et al.* 2003; Gautié and Schmitt 2010). Net of other factors, both should increase dissatisfaction, even if the “fractured world” of contingent employees limits the emergence of occupational identity and coworker solidarity (Smith 1998). But new forms of precariousness produced by just-in-time scheduling (Lambert 2008; Henly, Shaefer and Waxman 2006) and involuntary part-time employment (Tilly 1996; Kalleberg 2000) may engender opposition around demands for stability (Standing 2011).

“Bad” working conditions, when conceptualized as those in which workers must undergo pain, be exposed to heat, cold or threat of bodily harm, are less prevalent in service contexts than in, e.g. steel plants or on construction sites;⁴ a corresponding lack of dissatisfaction and opposition is thus expected. Recent analyses, however, point to special forms of dissatisfaction resulting from stressful or emotionally draining service work (Erickson and Wharton 1997; Renneberg 2004; Lopez 2006).

Finally, in the field of worker characteristics, it has long been noted that service workers are often recruited from disadvantaged or “secondary” segments of the labor market (Gordon *et al.* 1982). Age, race and gender have historically been the most salient means of segregation into this group, with immigration status providing a burgeoning new one (Tannock 2001; Sassen 2001; Ness 2005; Gordon 2005). Younger (i.e. 25 and under) and older (i.e. 60 and over) individuals often find themselves in this category, as well as women, non-whites and immigrants,

⁴ With the notable exception of restaurant work (Jayaraman *et al.* 2011).

particularly those without documents. But “secondary” has a dual connotation: from the employer’s perspective, on the one hand, and from the worker’s on the other. And the lumping together of such disparate social groups (essentially anyone who’s not white, male, native-born and between the ages of 25 and 60) under a single heading seems to obscure more than it reveals (see Milkman 1987, 3-5). To make this concept operable, I here employ a definition of “secondary” that proceeds exclusively from the worker’s perspective: whether one has a personal situation (parental, spousal, public or otherwise) that would allow him or her to withdraw from waged work altogether and maintain an equivalent standard of living with regard to housing, food, healthcare, childcare, etc. Workers in this position are often thought to be less bothered by adversity and less committed to change in any given workplace; their greater preponderance in services as against manufacturing is thus thought to mitigate the emergence of class conscious attitudes.

I have now identified seven ways in which service dynamics may alter manufacturing-based hypotheses about work and consciousness: 1) emotional labor and branded work identities may mitigate occupational identity and solidarity; 2) smaller workplaces with less collectivization may also reduce solidarity; 3) gendered job norms may do the same but may also produce heightened solidarity and opposition in certain contexts; 4) triadic workplace structures and their attendant managerial styles may decrease opposition; 5) low pay and job security may increase dissatisfaction, if partially obscuring identity and solidarity; 6) less adverse working conditions may decrease dissatisfaction; and 7) workers’ secondary labor market positions may mitigate all four elements of class consciousness. Thus far, research into service workers’ subjectivity has investigated the consciousness engendered by work structures, but rarely workers’ consciousness *of* those structures (exceptions being Sallaz 2002, 2009; Sherman 2007).

Many studies also lack theoretical linkages to the political-economic functions of interactive work.⁵ For these reasons, the promise of service work analysis to shed light on the challenges of “service worker unionism” has gone unfulfilled (Cobble and Merrill 2009).

Union Revitalization?

Service worker unionism has been addressed, if somewhat indirectly, in the literature on union revitalization. A common thread, however, is the dearth of sectorally focused discussions that combine interrogation of workplace norms and structures with synthetic strategies for union growth.⁶ Here I map out proposals for union renewal and determine which might be effective for organizing service workers *per se*.

Initial calls for revitalization focused on organizing tactics. Since traditional methods have become ineffective for winning union recognition (Freeman 1985; Lawler 1990; Lopez 2004, 37-62), Bronfenbrenner and others advocated the systematic use of “rank-and-file intensive tactics” (Bronfenbrenner 1993; Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 1998), or what they called “organizing to win”. Yet despite widespread advocacy of such approaches, few unions today actually practice them (see Gapasin and Yates 1997; Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004). Voss and Sherman (2000) found that an “organizing” emphasis among union locals often came from the imposition of such policy by the national leadership (see also Fletcher and Hurd 1998). SEIU locals were found to be the most consistently pro-organizing among their sample and a wave of pro-SEIU literature followed, with the term “social movement unionism” becoming almost

⁵ Big-box retail, illegal sex-work, hospitality and state-funded elderly care, though occurring in completely different economic branches and under widely varying structural constraints have periodically been lumped together as ‘interactive services’.

⁶ The closest approaches in this direction are Cobble’s (1991, 2001) and Heckscher’s (2001) calls for occupation-based unionism, but as will be seen, they tend to over-generalize the applicability of this model and it appears a rough fit at best for low-wage service workers (see Lopez 2004, 141).

synonymous with that union's approach (Robinson 2000; Lopez 2004; Ganz 2009; Sallaz 2010). "Top-down revival" initiated by 'progressive' union leaders with experience in the 'new' social movements emerged as a second, more institutionally focused proposal for renewal (Clawson 2003, 23; Milkman 2006, 150-55; Voss and Sherman 2000).

SEIU and HERE campaigns employed policy-centered and community-based approaches that have also been independently pursued as pathways to unionization. Policy campaigns have taken the form of municipal living-wage, paid family leave, labor-law enforcement and worker reclassification efforts (Luce 2004; Fine and Gordon 2010; Delp and Quan 2002; Poo 2011). Community-based approaches, receiving their fullest expression in the hundreds of worker centers proliferating since the 1980s (Fine 2006) generally appeal to non-work identities (Ness 2005; Hetland 2009; Jenkins 2002 for a critique). These strategies are thought to be useful for low-wage service organizing due to such workers' lack of structural power (in the case of policy initiatives) and job-based identity (in the case of community partnerships).

In the early 21st century, a shift in emphasis took place from rank-and-file intensive campaigns to employer-negotiated neutrality agreements, which, while successful in expanding membership, often yielded inferior contracts (Gaus 2010). Some argued that SEIU's practice of trusteeing locals and consolidating them into "mega-locals" developed into a mechanism for squelching dissent rather than a lever of rejuvenation (Early 2011, 173-206), reviving long-standing calls for revitalization through rank-and-file insurgency (Aronowitz 1973; Parker and Slaughter 1994; Nissen 1998; Moody 2007a).

None of these proposals, however, are oriented to the intrinsic dynamics of service work. One that advances the idea of renewed occupational unionism that would cater to a "mobile,

‘contingent’ workforce” (Cobble 2001, 85). Referred to by some as “‘full-service’ unionism” (Lopez 2004, 6), this model consists of four components:

(1) occupational identity, (2) control over the labor supply in the occupation, (3) rights and benefits as a function of occupational membership rather than of worksite affiliation, and (4) peer control over occupational performance standards. (Cobble 1991b, 421)

Unions of this form are thought to be a better fit for services than their worksite-based counterparts due to the re-appearance of “new crafts, occupations and professions in which worker identity is primarily horizontal,” (Cobble 2001, 85; Heckscher 2001; Green and Tilly 1987; Piore 1994). The strength of this proposal seems to rest on the veracity of skill-upgrading theories of service work⁷ (Bell 1973; Ross 2002; Florida 2005), and although these underlying theories have come under heavy critique (see Braverman 1974; Harvey 1989; Lipietz 1989; Vallas 1999), Cobble *et al.*’s appeal to labor-process transformations in deriving a call for union renewal is a marked innovation.

A second service-specific approach is the non-adversarial model advanced by Hoerr (1997, 235-67; also Freeman and Rogers 1999; Cobble and Merrill 2009). In the context of organizing the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW), Hoerr points to the effectiveness of “a ‘female way’ of thinking and doing” in which “there is no competing for attention...and certainly no shouting” (*ibid*, 245). Organizers eschewed an ‘us and them’ stance towards management and the union’s first contract did not contain a grievance procedure, but a collaborative framework for “peaceful resolution” of workplace issues (*ibid*, 259). Hoerr’s designation of these approaches as “feminine” relies on an essentialist mode of thought (e.g. Gilligan 1982) and has been duly criticized (Hurd 1998). But his general argument remains valid that consensus-based, non-adversarial forms of unionism may be better suited to organizing

⁷ Insofar as craft or occupational unionism derives its strength from what Wright (2000) terms “marketplace structural power”—monopolization of scarce skills—and that this structural power is re-created through a skill-upgrading shifts in employment relations.

workers who view themselves as caretakers and helpers rather than value-producers (also Fantasia 1988, 133-42; Lopez 2004, 55-8; Poo 2009).

From this discussion, three general strategies for contemporary organizing in the U.S. can be identified, one of which pertains specifically to service workers.⁸ The first is that of the “rank-and-file intensive” or what some have called the “comprehensive” model: this form is focused on specific workplaces and though it may or may not employ NLRB-sanctioned ballots and recognition, its defining characteristics are the active involvement of workers *as organizers* and the use of multiple tactics—strikes, boycotts, legal action, protests or public dramas—to pressure employers. The second is the “full-service” or occupational organizing model outlined by Cobble which, in its specific use among service workers, may also include aspects of HUCTW’s “non-adversarial” approach. Third and finally is the public policy or what some (such as Jenkins 2002) might call the advocacy-based approach. Cutting across all three of these practical approaches is the more fundamental question of bureaucracy vs. democracy within workers’ organizations: to put it in Offe and Wieselth’s (1980) terms, whether such groups’ strategies are pursued in “monological” or “dialogical” fashion with regard to existing power structures.

In what remains, I propose a method for investigating whether and to what degree low-wage service work produces class consciousness and union receptivity, and, on the basis of this, the forms of unionism appropriate to this growing sector.

Research Design

Because service work research has largely ignored intrinsic labor process aspects (Warhurst, Thompson and Nickson 2009) and their ability to engender class consciousness,

⁸ The strategies discussed are also not exhaustive—“global unionism” and others could be added to the mix (Moody 1997; Bronfenbrenner 2007; Lerner 2007; McCallum 2011)

orienting concepts for *what it means* to be class conscious and *how one gets there* in a service environment are not yet developed enough to permit reduction of these variables to closed-answer survey prompts. A qualitative, case-study method is therefore better suited to the exploration of class consciousness—both as produced (or not) in the service workplace, and as developed (or not) in the context of organizing. I undertake a sectoral focus on one large service industry—retail trade—and discuss the strategic relevance of my three chosen cases.

Of the nine service-providing industries defined by the U.S. Census,⁹ education and health, wholesale and retail, and professional and business services are the largest.¹⁰ Education and health, with a combined union density of 19.5 percent have clearly proven organizable, mostly because they are in the public sector (Moody 1988, 193-220). Professional and business services, though only 3.2 percent unionized, contain a large proportion (54.7 percent) of professional and managerial workers, and weekly earnings even for *non-supervisory* staff are 124 percent of the private-sector mean. In retail, however, only 9.8 percent of workers hold managerial positions and frontline wages are 63 percent of the private-sector mean (US BLS, 2011).¹¹ Union density is a meager 4.9 percent, making retail the single largest service industry with a predominantly low-wage, non-union workforce. Recent accounts point to the centrality of retail in the global articulation of America's 'postindustrial' economy as well as its influence on employment practices in other sectors (Lichtenstein 2006, 2009; Moody 2007a; Lambert 2008).

Retail is a complex sector with many subsectors. General merchandise firms make up the largest portion of employment (21 percent in 2011), the second-largest of sales (14.4 percent in

⁹ Wholesale and retail trade, transportation and utilities, information, financial activities, professional and business services, education and health services, other services, and public administration (although transportation and utilities, with high proportions of production-type jobs) (US BLS, 2011).

¹⁰ Respectively employing 22.8, 14.1, and 11.3 percent, respectively, of the American workforce in 2011; retail alone accounted for 11.4 percent, placing it second behind education and health (or health alone) and above professional and business services.

¹¹ Second only to non-supervisory leisure and hospitality workers, who earned 43 percent of the private-sector average.

2007) and third-largest of profit (14 percent in 2007).¹² This subsector also has the fastest rate of employment growth, expanding 23 percent between 1990 and 2011. Its department store sub-sector (NAICS 4521) accounts for half of its employment (10.5 percent of the retail total) and includes traditional department stores along with big-box discounters.¹³ Firms in this sector, from Macy's and Sears to Walmart and Target, have long played leading roles in industry change (Benson 1986; Leach 1993; Jacoby 1997; Lichtenstein 2006, 2009). For these reasons, department store retail provides a conspicuous target of study.

Department stores have also undergone a long-term shift from “traditional” to discount models (Zukin 2004; Lichtenstein 2006). Home to some of the most emblematic traditional stores, New York has only recently been colonized by formerly suburban big-box and discount chains (Angotti 2008). A focus on paradigmatic cases of each model in the same city should allow for insight into work transformations over time while controlling for demographic and local-institutional variance. In choosing cases for study, Macy's and Target stand out. Due to recent closures and mergers Macy's, Inc. is now the largest national chain of traditional department stores. Four of Macy's New York stores have been unionized since the 1960s; these should provide particularly useful cases insofar as union presence generally restricts labor process change (Montgomery 1979, 15-18). Of the big-three discount chains (Walmart, Kmart and Target), Target is second in size only to Walmart and is continually expanding. While Walmart has been extensively analyzed, Target remains under-investigated, stemming partly

¹² Employment figures come from US BLS and calculated monthly, thus available for 2011; Sales and profit figures come from the Economic Census, conducted every five years, most recently in 2007.

¹³ The “other general merchandise stores” sub-sub-sector (NAICS 4529) includes dollar and used-good stores, but also warehouse clubs and super-centers (NAICS 45291)—discount department stores with full-line grocery offerings.

from its conscious promotion of a ‘socially responsible’ image;¹⁴ it therefore deserves further study. Kmart, once the largest discounter, has been eclipsed by Walmart and entered a period of decline. Thus to study the vanguard of discount store work and worker consciousness, Target is a prime candidate. Table 1.1 displays key characteristics for each firm, highlighting the comparative utility of these cases with regard to their respective store models, unionization levels and sales methods.

Table 1.1: Selected Characteristics for Macy’s, Inc. and Target Corporation, 2011

	Macy’s, Inc.	Target Corporation
Model	Traditional, full-line	Discount
U.S. outlets	842 (including 44 Bloomingdale’s)	1,763
U.S. employees	171,000	365,000
U.S. sales	\$26.4 billion	\$68.5 billion
U.S. profit (post-tax)	\$1.3 billion	\$2.9 billion
Profit rate (post-tax)	4.8%	4.3%
Sales/employee	\$154,415	\$187,578
Cost of merchandise	\$15.7 billion	\$47.8 billion
CoM as % of sales	59.6%	69.9%
Unionization	10% of workforce	None
Sales method	Individual: some commission; personal sales goals; no cashiers	Collective: no commission; store-wide sales goals; cashiers

Sources: Macy’s, Inc. Annual Report (Form 10-K) 2012; Target Corporation Annual Report (Form 10-K) 2012.

To compare unionization strategies, a third case study of retail organizing was also conducted: New York’s Retail Action Project (RAP), supported by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) and currently the nation’s only worker center specifically organizing retail workers (see Fine 2006).¹⁵ RAP has deployed several of the strategies posed by union revitalization theorists during its seven-year existence—from comprehensive organizing and community-based partnerships to policy initiatives and occupational unionism. Investigation

¹⁴ Significantly, while Walmart repeatedly struggles against local anti-Walmart campaigns for new store locations, as in New York, Target has encountered very little resistance, evidenced by the eight stores it already has in the city while Walmart has none—and not for a lack of trying.

¹⁵ While there is also the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart), this is not a true workers’ center but a national organization oriented exclusively to Walmart workers and funded by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), RWDSU’s parent union.

of RAP offers a window into the efficacy of alternative organizing strategies as they pertain specifically to retail.

Data on work organization and worker consciousness at Macy's and Target stores were gathered through 60 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 62 workers and managers centering on three main topics: workplace organization and routines, attitudes to management, coworkers and customers, and personal histories and future expectations. Regarding the organization of work in each company's stores, interviewees served as *informants*; concerning their subjective experiences, they served as *respondents*. In their role as respondents, the goal was to assess workers' degree of job satisfaction, the extent to which they identified as workers (retail or otherwise) and with their current coworkers, and whether they saw managerial or corporate interests as antagonistic or harmonious with their own. Lastly, all respondents were asked how they felt about unions and whether they would prefer one in their current workplace.

Through qualitative analysis of subjects' open-ended responses I examine the presence of the elements of class consciousness and union receptivity described above. Interviews were conducted with 31 workers per company, focusing primarily on sales personnel (salespersons, cashiers and first-level supervisors), though a minority of stock workers were also included. Corporate approval was not sought due to the bias it might have engendered in workers' responses (Tannock 2001, 228). Because of this, respondents were selected in non-probabilistic fashion through in-store discussions, with formal interviews of 30 to 90 minutes set up on this basis. Participants were offered \$20 each for a completed interview and chosen so as to maximize diversity with regard to age, gender, job tenure and department of employment. Interview data on workplace organization are supplemented through documentary analysis of

company reports and publications and an extended interview with the president of the Macy's union local.

In the case of the Retail Action Project, data were also gathered through interviews with key staff and worker-members, participant observation at meetings, public events and as a volunteer at the organization's office, as well as through analysis of internal documents. Access was granted to RAP through its director and founder, Carrie Gleason. The goal in analyzing RAP's deployment of new organizing strategies is to assess why members join and stay involved, or otherwise choose not to—that is, the applicability of RAP's appeals to retail workers' *existing* consciousness and the usefulness of its methods for developing workers' *potential* consciousness.

Each case is analyzed in the context of its respective organizational and contextual history. The primary sources of data for these discussions are the two firms' own public documents, RAP's internal and public documents, and the rich secondary literature on the evolution of the retail industry (Hower 1943; Harrington 1962; Benson 1986; Leach 1993; Jacoby 1997; Ziskind 2003; Zukin 2004; Opler 2007; Lichtenstein 2009; Moreton 2009). For the analysis of RAP's development, aggregate governmental statistics on the retail industry and workforce in New York City are also used (U.S. Census, BLS and BEA).

Overview

My analysis unfolds in seven chapters, the first of which is the present one. Chapters 2 and 3 proceed inductively to provide in-depth overviews of the selling process at Macy's and Target stores. Macy's is found to organize work according to a specialized and decentralized model that displays marked tendencies towards speed-up, deskilling and increasing (though

contested) reliance on contingent employees in recent years. Target, by contrast, exhibits a more centrally managed and collectivized division of labor within its stores, with positions already emptied of many conceptual functions. In its use of a predominantly contingent workforce and deliberate fostering of a “teamwork” ethic, this company carries to conclusion several of the incipient trends observed at Macy’s.

In chapter 4 I review the findings from these two firms to provide preliminary answers to my first two research questions regarding service work change and its current structures. Using contemporary Macy’s as a proxy for earlier and Target for later modes of sales-work organization, I argue that the transition from the ‘traditional’ to the discount retail model consists in a deskilling process that has been accompanied by significant collectivization of the sales effort at Target. In this chapter, I also develop a synthetic model of ‘contingent control’ predicated of low-wage service workplaces that operate under large-scale corporate ownership.

Chapter 5 turns to the central question of class consciousness, comparing and contrasting the perceptions of Macy’s and Target workers. While Macy’s workers display more overt class consciousness on almost all dimensions, views of their roles and interests in the workplace are more individualistic and instrumental than those of their counterparts at Target; several voice frustration with their union for not doing enough. Evidence presented in this chapter speaks against two hypotheses about service work’s mitigating effects on class consciousness: gendered work and emotional labor.

In chapter 6 I consider three types of organizing pursued by the Retail Action Project: comprehensive workplace organizing, occupational organizing and public policy campaigning. The most tangible success is found to result from both workplace and occupational efforts and the least, thus far, from policy initiatives. More generally, RAP’s orientation towards fashion-

minded apparel workers is found to have limited applicability to other areas of retail, and its staff-driven, policy-oriented approach unlikely to engender robust class consciousness among its members or “transform the industry” in the near future. Its greatest innovations, however, are its open membership structure and organizational independence from any particular employer.

In the final chapter, lessons from all three case studies are drawn with respect to the challenges and potential for union growth among low-wage service workers.

Chapter 2. Macy's: The Arena of Sales under Pressure

Having explicated key theories of work, consciousness and organizing, I now turn to explore the dynamics of contemporary retail workplaces. The first of my two cases is Macy's, the largest extant chain of what might still be termed "traditional" department stores; the second is Target, the second-largest and fastest growing discount chain. The choice of these is an attempt to capture two distinct phases in the evolution of sales work, much as Blauner's (1964) analysis of post-war industries sought to capture stages in the evolution of manufacturing. As mentioned at the outset, four of Macy's New York-area stores—including its flagship on 34th Street—are unionized and have been so for more than half a century. These were chosen to provide accurate examples of the traditional model, since unionization often restricts workplace transformation, preserving a greater number of 'past practices' for posterity (Montgomery 1979).

In this and the following chapter I examine the organization of work at Macy's and Target as depicted primarily through workers' own accounts. The labor process dimensions discussed in chapter 1 serve as analytic guideposts: intrinsic (control, complexity, collectivization), extrinsic (compensation and job security, working conditions, managerial style, unionization) and worker characteristics (primary vs. secondary job seekers). Within the framework of these categories, however, I aim to provide a layered description of work life. Central to this account is the tension between formal work guidelines and structures, on the one hand, and the actual practices of workers and managers, on the other.

At Macy's work is organized in a decentralized fashion. The firm's orientation to a middle-income, fashion-conscious clientele has led it to pursue a brand-based, boutique style in its stores. There is little functional overlap between departments and sales are made in one or another; there are no dedicated cashiers or store-wide checkout lanes, as at Target. For these

reasons, I describe Macy's as an *arena of sales* rather than an integrated selling operation. In recent years, its decentralized structure has been deepened through the introduction of numeric sales goals applied to each individual sales worker (commissioned and non-commissioned) and each department as a whole. Workers describe the effects of this policy as increasing the pressure to sell while heightening competition among them to attain goals that are sometimes unrealistic. Increased multi-tasking, however, provides for a latent collectivization of floor maintenance tasks, which at times contradicts the individualized nature of selling.

In what follows I first provide a brief history and overview of Macy's as a firm, before proceeding to analyze the structure of work, the employment relationship, and the backgrounds and expectations of New York Macy's workers. Lastly, I summarize the presence and extent of labor process aspects thought to engender or inhibit class consciousness.

Macy's, Inc.

Macy's, Inc. is the largest chain of "full-line" department stores in the U.S. by sales. Among general merchandisers (i.e. including discount chains) it ranks fifth and among all retailers sixteenth (National Retail Federation 2012). The company operates 847 stores in the U.S. and sold over \$26 billion worth of goods in 2011 (Macy's 2012a).

In 1858 Rowland Hussey Macy, a Quaker businessman, founded a Manhattan dry goods store just south of 14th Street, which succeeded through his use of continually updated merchandise lines and cash-only policy. Members of Macy's extended family owned and ran the store until 1896 when two brothers, Isidor and Nathan Straus, former (and successful) lease-department owners, bought them out but kept the Macy name. In 1902 they relocated to the much larger 34th Street store that serves as the current flagship and in 1922 their successors

issued stock, taking the company public (Hower 1943; Grippo 2009). Also during the 1920s, Macy's bought existing department stores in Toledo, OH, Atlanta, GA and Newark, NJ (Bamberger's) and this expansion continued after the Second World War with acquisitions in San Francisco and Kansas City, MO as well as through the opening of branch stores in various New York suburbs. All of this occurred under the aegis of the Strauses, who held controlling shares of R.H. Macy & Co. until 1986, when chairman and CEO Edward Finkelstein led a leveraged buyout that took the firm private again (Barmash 1989). While some changes that these new manager-owners introduced were credited with a brief uptick in sales, this was erased with the onset of recession in 1989 and in January 1993, the company filed for bankruptcy. Shortly thereafter the autonomous history of R.H. Macy & Co. came to an end.

The company now called Macy's, Inc. is actually the combined successor of many of America's once-famous regional department stores and its long, convoluted history encapsulates much of the secular trend towards concentration in this sector. Five primary streams of ownership can be identified, one of which is R.H. Macy & Co. The others are Federated Department Stores (founded in 1929), Allied Stores (1935), Associated Dry Goods (1916) and May Department Stores (1877). In 1994 Federated Department Stores bought out bankrupt Macy's, and in 2005 merged with May, yielding the renamed Macy's, Inc. A series of mergers beginning in the 1980s, however, slowly prepared the intra-industry magnitude of this final act. Six years before Federated, whose constituents included Filene's (Boston), Abraham & Straus (Brooklyn) and Bloomingdale's (New York), bought R.H. Macy & Co., it acquired Allied Stores, itself consisting of Jordan Marsh (Boston), Bon Marche (Seattle), Stern's (New York) and others. The other two tributaries of Macy's, Inc. were of course May Department Stores of St. Louis, and Associated Dry Goods of New York. Both of these had grown through gradual

accretion and mergers, which in May's case included Kaufmann's (Pittsburgh) and Marshall Field's (Chicago), and in 1986 May bought Associated, nineteen years before merging with Federated (Macy's 2012a, 54-56; Grippo 2009). This complex genealogy precedes the firm named "Macy's" today; the names of regional sub-entities (e.g. Filene's, Marshall Field's) were changed to Macy's in the 1990s and 2000s, with the sole exception of Bloomingdale's. Macy's, Inc. is headquartered in Cincinnati and operates 799 mid-scale Macy's stores, 48 upscale Bloomingdale's stores and employs 171,000 workers in the U.S. (Macy's 2012a).

Use of the nameplate "Macy's" for many extant department stores obscures history; the choice of this title in 2006 by the management of Federated and May owes much to the accumulated symbolic capital of the brand, nurtured over the years by the original company's sponsorship of iconic public events (4th of July fireworks, Thanksgiving Day Parade), immortalization in film (e.g. *Miracle on 34th Street*, both the 1947 original and the 1994 remake), and the central location of the flagship store in America's cultural and financial capital. But with its subsumption of formerly independent regional retailers, Macy's, Inc. has also inherited much of the legacy of mid-20th-century department store unionism. By the company's own admission, 10 percent or approximately 17,000 of its workers "are represented by unions" (Macy's 2012b, 8). Department store locals established by the Retail Clerks International Association (now UFCW) at independent stores in Boston (Jordan Marsh), Pittsburgh (Kaufmann's¹⁶), Seattle (Bon Marche), Baltimore (Hecht's) and at Macy's own San Francisco stores, have persisted throughout this evolving ownership structure, in tandem with RWDSU locals at Macy's and Bloomingdale's stores in New York (locals 1-S and 3, respectively) (Kirstein 1950). With regard to labor relations, Macy's, Inc. is thus a successor to rather than a conqueror of this past history.

¹⁶ This local was split between RCIA and RWDSU, and is still a jointly-administered UFCW/RWDSU entity.

The contemporary firm consists of two divisions: Macy's and Bloomingdale's. The Macy's division has eight national regions with 69 total districts and 799 stores—eight to ten districts and 94 to 125 stores per region (Macy's 2012a, 30). The 48 Bloomingdale's are more simply divided among fifteen metropolitan "markets" (*ibid*, 51). Average store size is just under 180,000 square feet (though the flagship is more than 2 million) and net sales for all stores in all regions totaled \$26.4 billion in 2011 and "were strongest in the southern regions" (*ibid*, 25, 29). Of this sum, 60 percent was accounted for in the cost price of merchandise and 31 percent in "selling, general and administrative expenses," which include employee wages as well as advertising and other overhead costs.¹⁷ The firm's post-tax profit and profit rate in 2011 were \$1.25 billion and 4.8 percent, respectively.

Macy's orients towards the broad middle of the consumer-income spectrum, citing as its primary competitors not only mid-level chains such as Sears and J.C. Penney but discounters Walmart and Target as well as up-market chains like Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and Saks (Macy's 2012b, 2). Though in the early and mid-20th century Macy's sold everything from pianos and large-scale appliances to children's toys and groceries, today 85 percent of its sales come from just three categories: apparel, accessories and cosmetics. Fully 62 percent of these sales come from products designed for adult or adolescent women, and 23 percent from those designed for men or children. The remaining 15 percent of sales come from home goods (bedding, cutlery, small-scale appliances) and miscellaneous (e.g. luggage) (Macy's 2012a, 24). To a large extent, Macy's is thus a women's apparel and cosmetics chain. According to company estimates, 78 percent of its total workforce and "69 percent of [its] management-level executives

¹⁷ Wage costs, however, are not disaggregated from advertising and other costs in the company's formal statements; neither are the wages of frontline sales from supervisory or clerical workers. A thorough examination of the company's cost and profit structure according to rigorous analytic concepts is thus unfortunately precluded.

are women”. Macy’s own literature is also quick to point out that “racial minorities” compose 51 percent of frontline workers and 32 percent of managers (*ibid*, 16).

The Interview Sample

To assess the internal dynamics of work at Macy’s, I interviewed a convenience sample sales-floor workers from two of the firm’s unionized stores in New York City. I conducted 30 interviews with 31 workers (one including two participants)—17 from one store and 14 from the other—that lasted an average of 46 minutes each. In addition, an extended interview was conducted with Ken Bordieri, president of RWDSU Local 1-S, which represents workers at the Macy’s stores studied.

Of the 31 interviewees, 21 were full-time and 10 were part-time employees. Seventeen were sales associates,¹⁸ the largest category of worker at Macy’s, eight were sales specialists, four were sales support staff (including sales-floor stock and merchandise handlers), one was a visual merchandiser, responsible for designing brand displays, and one an assistant manager. Twenty-five worked in clothing and apparel departments (including two shoe salespersons), with the remainder in cosmetics (2), sunglasses (2), jewelry (1) and bedding (1). Six were paid partially on a commission basis and the rest on straight hourly wages. With regard to job tenure, this ranged from just a few months to 31 years. Nine of those interviewed had worked at Macy’s for less than a year, fourteen between one and five years, four between five and ten, and four for more than ten years.

¹⁸ The re-naming of salespersons as “associates” has been a contentious move in retail largely driven by the expansion of Walmart, which also refers to its frontline staff as such. At Macy’s, this term has not only a narrower meaning—those who actually ring up sales and are below the rank of “specialist”—but is also extensively used by workers to refer themselves and others. For this reason, I too use this term throughout my analysis of Macy’s.

As to demographics, 18 interviewees were women and 13 were men. One participant was less than 20 years old, the majority (17) between 20 and 30, five between 30 and 40, four between 40 and 50, and four over 50 years old. Seventeen participants were black (African and Afro-Caribbean as well as African-American), seven white, two Latino and five were of Asian descent. More than two thirds (21) were born in the United States and the rest were born abroad.

This sample makes no claim to representativeness, but it is nonetheless useful to understand the backgrounds of those whose voices are here used to depict the dynamics of Macy's sales work. In a later section, I describe the life situations and job expectations of these workers in greater depth.

The Structure of Work

Here I explore the intrinsic aspects of work: task complexity, collectivization and managerial control. Before doing so, I outline the division of sales-floor labor at Macy's. A picture emerges of a high-stress workplace in which associates and specialists are required to multi-task to replace the work of cashiers and a waning number of support staff. At the same time, both are under increasing pressure to maximize sales following the recent introduction of a computerized goals system. Collectivization is minimal, and possibly decreasing, while managerial control is on the rise. But a degree of autonomy remains in the arena of customer interaction: many workers depend on charisma and informally acquired product knowledge to achieve their sales goals and ultimately, those of the firm.

Division of Labor

Merchandise at Macy's is arranged according to function, but also by brand and the target demographics of shoppers. The type of sales staff employed in each department varies with price and product. In men's suits, for example, "there are five or six tailors and about fifteen to twenty salespeople"; "the whole suit floor works on commission," says a three-year sales associate. In a lower-priced apparel department, such as women's junior's, "there will be just a bunch of associates depending on how busy we are"; their main job is to "greet customers and engage them to open star rewards and get a Macy's card, the managers get recognition for that" (1-year sales associate). According to two saleswomen in cosmetics who regularly apply make-up to customers, "we don't really associate with people in other departments, we just stay in cosmetics—cosmetics and fragrances are kind of like the elite in Macy's." These women, like many sales staff in branded departments, are partially or entirely paid by their brand vendors. A one-year specialist for a particular line of women's clothing states that while "Macy's is my supervisor, we work with our vendor to produce the floor and make sure we sell the clothes—they come in twice a week and pretty much redesign the floor, make sure all of our new products is out, make sure everything is in order." As a two-year associate from lingerie describes it, "it's almost like a bunch of different stores," with minimal overlap between departments. Price and product are thus one axis along which sales work is divided at Macy's.

But there are other axes, both vertical and horizontal. Within a department, specialists are distinguished from sales associates and support staff; another store-wide boundary separates all of them from the multiple layers of management. Horizontal divisions are based on the flow of goods: from receiving staff and overnight stock workers to daytime support staff, sales personnel and merchandisers. A specialist is someone who "do[es] cashier and sell[s], so I'm like the shop manager, and then we have a stock person so I don't have to do that" (1-year specialist). A four-

year associate describes the role of a specialist somewhat differently, however, as people who “specialize in what they do but are not managers over the department.” Generally, specialists maintain the appearance and have an overview of sales for a given brand or section; they delegate some tasks but do not hire, fire or set others’ schedules, and earn only slightly more than associates or support workers. According to one five-year associate-come-specialist, the specialist’s job consists in “more tasks but not really more money!”

Sales associates are the largest group of employees at Macy’s. Aside from their obvious role in answering customer questions and encouraging them to buy, they sort and return items left out of place, clean and maintain their area, and ring up purchases. The following is an exchange with an 18-year sales associate and union shop steward from the bedding department:

Q: Are there no dedicated cashiers?

A: Hardly. I mean sometimes during the one-day sales for instance we have people who stand behind the register because you don’t have time, but everyone makes sales. That has changed. When I came we had exit registers where the cashiers were and the salespeople sold and the cashiers cashed.

Q: So they got rid of the cashiers?

A: Well they actually made them salespeople.

Support staff interact less with customers and perform no cashier duties. According to one: “I’m a stock boy, so basically all I do is move around the merchandise and make sure everything is in order.” Another support worker describes her area of work as “censoring the merchandise, sizing the floor and when we have new material, I come in and make sure it’s ready for restock.” Merchandisers are a more elusive group: other sales floor workers are aware of their existence but see them only rarely. “I’m all merchandising,” states one, “I don’t deal with customers, I don’t deal with sales, I just deal with set-up.” Although Macy’s has in-house merchandisers and visual display specialists, many such workers, like the young woman just quoted, are employed by sub-contractors and rotate between Macy’s and other area stores.

Vertical divisions involve the many layers of management. At the floor level, managers are split between operations and sales, the first of which deal with “all the stock, merchandising and filling,” and the second of which “is just for the sales force, the salespeople and customer-related issues” (18-year associate and shop steward). At the top of the pyramid is the general store manager, or GSM, followed by sales floor managers, then sales group or “store” managers (two or three per floor), “then that group manager has several managers running different departments” (*ibid*) whom sales staff refer to as either “supervisors” or “assistant store managers”. At the flagship 34th Street store, operations managers are concentrated on the second floor, and coordinate with their respective sales-floor counterparts from there.

A common theme among frontline workers was the impression that there were many managers: “oh my God,” relates a female support worker, “Macy’s is filled with managers, they even have a stockroom manager.” A female apparel specialist: “on my floor in ready-to-wear we have four managers, and then we have an assistant store manager for ready-to-wear and then the store manager, so everything has to go by the assistant store manager and my manager says she always communicates with her but we never see it.” A male associate from a branded youth section: “Right now on my floor there is one full-time manager and two part-time managers. There is a manager that works with customers which is apart from the group ones, and then there is a manager on top of the managers for men's, and then there is another manager in shoes.”

A final axis of division consists of gender and age.¹⁹ A one-year specialist in her early twenties echoes the views of several others in believing both to be derivative of departments’ target demographics:

I would say more women work in the women's department and more men work in the men's department. The fifth floor has more older people because that age range, that style

¹⁹ Race and ethnicity, long axes of labor division and still prevalent as such in retail and other outfits, were not described by subjects as salient categories of job segregation at Macy’s.

of clothing—I don't want to call it 'old people clothing' but it's more conservative, more covered up.

A 31-year male associate also sees evidence of gender and age-typing among departments, although several are largely mixed:

A: Most of the younger people are in housewares, women's shoes and men's shoes. Jewelry is where the old-timers are mostly.

Q: Is that because it's a high-profit department?

A: Not really, it's just the way it was. Housewares is younger people. My department it's 50-50, men's is 50-50—yeah men's and women's shoes are all a bunch of young people.

One associate in her early twenties felt she had been gender-typed into a women's department when she would have preferred men's: "There's maybe one or two male associates in our department and in men's departments too I think it will be mostly men. When I applied I wanted to work in men's because it's what I went to school for. I guess that's just not the norm so they didn't go for it." Two associates who worked in off-gender departments—a woman in men's suits and a man in women's junior's—were conscious of their divergence from departmental norms: "Sometimes I'm standing with a colleague," the saleswoman relates, "and a customer will come up and I don't exist because it's a man thing." To the salesman, "it's like you're always under pressure because you're the only male, so you've got to show sales, you've got to show that you belong here." With regard to managers, however, most interviewees saw them as gender-mixed, and none gave evidence of the male managerial bias uncovered at other large retailers (e.g. Jacoby 1997, 95-142 for Sears; Moreton 2009, for Walmart).

Routines and Tasks

In my store we are back to the pre-Adam Smith days: the managers want you to do everything, you have to make points, you have to fold the clothes. It helps them win because it sets us against each other. It's like a multi-task, having you do each process—it's an assembly line but they want you to know the process so that everybody has the

same function. But it doesn't work like that, because it pressures some people more than others. (6-year specialist)

As the years went by, the salesperson does everything. We used to have stock people, now I think there's one stock person for the whole floor. It's just—you do everything, you are a glorified stock person. (31-year associate)

I regularly asked interviewees to describe their daily work routines. From their responses, which were usually a list of tasks and times punctuated by breaks, meetings and anecdotal episodes, I inquired further about each task: maintaining displays, talking with customers, closing sales, cleaning the department, etc. What emerges from these discussions is a picture of *inverted Taylorism*. Rather than an increasing subdivision and simplification of tasks, individual sales workers are required to take on a larger number of ancillary functions to become 'all-around' workers. The Taylorist imperative of raising individual output, however, is ever-present: while expected to assume maintenance and cashier duties, sales workers' output in terms of direct sales are increasingly quantified, measured and incentivized—or rather *disincentivized* (since achievement results mainly in freedom from reprimand)—through the introduction of a computerized, point-based 'goals' system. In what follows, I depict the dynamics and differential effects of this 'individualized multi-tasking' through the daily experience of sales-floor workers.

Specialists, associates and support staff typically listed a set of non-selling tasks related to the upkeep of a given department. One four-year associate in a women's department described

a lot of the same: we come in, open up the registers, see if there are any rods on the floor or clothes that need to be put back in any of the areas that they [managers] put us in for the day. We put the merchandise out on the floor, making sure and maintaining that the area is clean for when we open up and the customers come.

Another four-year associate noted the importance of making sure

your wrap stand [register] is clean, that you have all the basic materials you need, such as receipt paper, labels to label the items with, your bags—it's very important to have your bags and no messy wrap stand, some scissors. And once that's clear, you go around and

check your floors to make sure all the merchandise is in its proper place, make sure that signs and everything are correct. Then you begin your day.

Such maintenance work continues throughout the day and is the primary concern of support staff during heavy shopping hours, but is largely concentrated in the pre- and post-shopping hours. “Usually we have more people closing and opening,” says a one-year sales specialist who had previously worked at a Macy’s store in Texas, “because it takes a lot of work to get the store back in order. Each department has to be put back in order after everybody has finished their shopping.” Though maintenance work never truly ceases, the intervening periods are composed more of customer interaction and the mechanics of selling.

In contrast to Target and other discount chains, Macy’s still relies to a large extent on the knowledge and charisma of its staff to make sales—though less than in its pre-war, counter-top days (Benson 1986; Mills 1951). To this end, Macy’s management has devised what they call the MAGIC selling method in which personnel are trained at hour-long sessions once or twice a year. MAGIC is an acronym:

The M stands for ‘*meet and make a connection*’: you meet a customer and you make a connection with them, compliment them on their sweater or say something like, ‘lovely weather we are having out today’. The A is for ‘*asking questions*’—the key is that you are supposed to ask open-ended questions, something they can’t just say ‘no thank you’ to, you want to ask like ‘oh, what brought you in today?’ The G is ‘*give advice*’: depending on what kind of answers you get from the questions you can give advice like, ‘oh, are you going to a wedding? Then you should wear this.’ The I is for ‘*inspire to buy*’: once you have gotten what your customer needs, now it's about what they want, so you could say, ‘oh, you're going to a wedding, but how about for dancing?’ And then Macy's is always looking for the credit card so that's something you can add on there. Then the C is for ‘*celebrate the purchase*’: after you ring them up and give them the receipt you give them a reason to come back, make them smile. (2-year commissioned sales associate; emphasis added)

In practice, however, many sales workers discard the MAGIC method and rely on their own interpersonal ability and acquired product knowledge. The same salesman who just described

MAGIC in such detail says, “I sort of use MAGIC, but really I'm more of a comedy person, so I try to stand out by my attitude and my luck.” A one-year specialist states that

with the MAGIC classes they train you for certain things but working here I just learned to be real patient and observant with customers because you can't come up to every customer the same way. Some of them want to be really attended to; some of them honestly just want to be left alone. When they are ready they will come to you.

A first-year cosmetics associate who studies acting, responded as follows to a question about occupational overlap:

Oh definitely, are you kidding? If I have a ridiculously rude customer that doesn't want to listen to anything I say and I have to put on a face and be professional, that's what I do. When the customer doesn't want to believe what I'm saying—improvising, it's really part of the job.

And an eleven-year associate from a women's department believes that “each store has their own gimmick, their own way to appeal to the people, but it's pretty about much being yourself, if you enjoy talking and selling. Each of us, we all do our own thing, no one does the same thing.”

MAGIC, she notes, is just the newest management initiative: “a few years ago the word was ‘outstanding’ or something like that—it's always something.”

To make a sale, some items require more description and advising on the part of sales staff than others. Usually greater description and hence, product knowledge, are required of bigger-ticket and thus commissioned sales departments. In men's suits,

You're supposed to ask open-ended questions. If they are browsing you ask, ‘what size can I find for you?’ You have to demonstrate your product knowledge because it's best to learn those things in terms of sales. You are supposed to garner clients who you can call up and tell when there is a sale to get those kinds of repeat sales numbers. (2-year associate)

A younger man from the same department says that he “didn't know anything about suits when I first started working here”; he “learn[ed] everything just by talking to other sales associates and

managers and of course the customers—listen to what they are looking for” (3-year associate).

Following this, he then describes in great detail contemporary fashion in men’s suits:

A: What's popular right now is two buttons, and two slits in the back, like one on each side, sometimes there is one in the middle and that is not as popular now, but I'm sure that will come back eventually. And then they had the peak lapels which are coming back in which you find mostly in the '50s and '60s and '70s, they have a really wide peak lapel. That's coming back in, because it looks better on the slim suits, in my opinion. And then there are three button suits, that's not as popular, but is still kind of with the Jewish community, I have a lot of Jewish customers who ask for three-button suits. Three button suits were more in style ten, fifteen years ago, now everything is two buttons. I would say 95 percent of the suits in Macy's are two-button suits.

Q: How long did it take you to get up to speed on all this?

A: It took me about a month to understand the floor, but I would say almost a year to be able to confidently express my opinions to customers.

In non-commissioned departments specialists are required to have more product knowledge than associates. A one-year specialist states that in her role, managers and vendors “expect you to know more about the merchandise than the regular associates. If a customer wanted to know something the vendor would expect me to answer the question, know the material, know what's running and all that.” A four-year specialist says that “we have to know our merchandise, about the brand, about different times and different styles, why this style during this season is in.” To the specialist just quoted, the “associates’ job is just selling, it doesn’t matter, there is no item,” but when asked directly, many non-commissioned associates and support workers affirm their familiarity with the products they handle and sell every day. An eleven-year part-time associate in a women’s clothing department:

You got to know the product on each floor and in your area, and in the building. On my floor in general yeah it's good to know the jeans so you can inform the customer on how the fit is. Being that I'm a woman of a certain size not only could I say that I like that, but I've purchased that or I've seen that on. But it's not always about making a sale. Me I'm just being honest, I will tell customers I didn't like something, I said that today! But we know our product—we have to know.

Reliance on personal intuition and product knowledge, combined with the multi-tasking required of associates and the sales goals placed on them (about which more later), lead to some incongruous results. As a five-year specialist notes, “because of these demands what actually happens is that the people who don't make [customers] happy stay by the register and have most of the contacts with customers, whereas you have to recover the mess that is left.” Other specialists describe a similar dynamic, whereby “associates...just get hired, get thrown out in the field and they ring customers up, they spend all day at the registers” (10-year specialist). “As a specialist,” says another, “I have to maintain my floor and in that case I miss my sales. Some people here they are always just ringing—selling and ringing are different” (4-year specialist). Because goals are only attained by ringing up a purchase, the need for charisma and knowledge to motivate buying may lead those who lack, or feel they lack, such abilities to circumvent the process—made easier by the limited number of registers:

In one department I have two registers but six persons working at the same time, each with a \$1000 goal. How could, in the same working hours, six people make the same target? They need a register to make sales, don't they? (4-year specialist)

In general, while the individual tasks required of sales staff might appear simple, the combinations and tensions among these make for anything but a simple routine: “There's only a certain number of things you have to do, but collectively it's a lot of work” says a two-year support worker. One associate's flustered response, when asked whether management requires multi-tasking, sums up the situation:

Do they? Oh my God, we do! How can I say it? We answer the phone, we register the person out, we go back to the floor, look for the item, we retake the item, pack the item, we also have to check the fitting rooms and put the clothes back, we also have to maintain the floors, right? You also have to open up credit, right? And then sometimes you have to go check the stock room as well and get—what else do we have to do? That's basically it. That's a lot of multitasking and we also have to order. (4-year associate)

Similarly heavy workloads described by most associates, combined with the recent implementation of numeric sales goals (discussed below) and long-term declines in staffing levels identified by all multi-year respondents provide clear evidence of an age-old management strategy in use at Macy's today: speed-up.

Collectivization

Collectivization is the degree to which task completion—in this case, selling items, maintaining department appearance and stock—is a cooperative effort. I have already shown that selling *per se* is highly individualized at Macy's, with each salesperson expected to achieve daily goals determined by management. This often generates competition—the opposite of cooperation—among sales staff:

Q: Do the goals ever create competition among salespeople?

A: Oh yeah they are always fighting over their goals. Like, 'oh I need to ring them here' or 'I'm supposed to ring'. It's created a problem between associates. (8-year associate and shop steward)

Q: Does the goals system ever produce...?

A1: Tension? Yeah, every single day, it's very competitive. If you see a customer you want to run after and approach them before someone else does because if they purchase something before you get to them someone else will get the sale instead of you. (1-year commissioned associate)

A2: That's a perk of being on-call, I don't have to compete for sales. I just sit back and watch them compete! (1-year non-commissioned associate, same department)

According to a ten-year associate, "You are in a hostile environment, that's how Macy's has become since they introduced this metric." These responses represent common impressions from salespersons on the effects of the goals system.

Within this competitive framework, however, there are times when staff have to cooperate to make a particular sale, raise the sales of the department (also assigned a goal for which supervisors are held responsible) or increase the selling ability of fellow associates. "If I

am trying to sell a top to your dress or skirt,” relates an eleven-year associate, “and a customer wants the same material-wise and I’m not sure, then someone else in the area can tell me whether the material is really 100 percent cotton or whatever.” Asked whether she has to work with other sales colleagues to make sales, a four-year associate from women’s intimates replies, “Yes, yes, especially with bra measuring. We see all the ladies!” And given a large volume of customers, workers in some departments help each other reach their goals:

If it's really busy then we work things out and say like, I'll be on the register for this amount of time and then you can go on, because we all know that we have goals so we help each other. If I made my goal and one of my associates didn't, I would help them make theirs because, you know, we are a team. (1-year specialist)

In learning how to sell, associates and specialists often mention the help and guidance they received from other salespersons. After listing the register and inventory functions formally taught him by managers, a two-year associate states that “every other function I basically learned with associates’ help” and a four-year associate considers her coworkers “family” because she’s “worked with them for four and a half years and they teach me to do different things.” These areas of cooperation noted, the general organization of selling at Macy’s “is individualistic, you feel like it's a dog-eat-dog kind of world. It doesn't support your humanity, it is extracting a maximum effort for little in return” (2-year commissioned associate).

If the push to maximize output through the imposition of individual goals decreases the collectivization of selling activity, the simultaneous expansion of non-selling tasks required of salespersons works in the opposite direction. Indeed, there is a nascent tension between these two aspects of work at Macy’s. A five-year specialist notes that she regularly helps other associates “fold their area if my area is clean—if I’m finishing mine I will go and help them get done with theirs.” A two-year support worker in fashion jewelry finds that maintenance tasks consist of

a lot of teamwork. If you are fixing a table, you have the right to ask your colleagues for help. There are also a lot of clearance trays, about five or six and you can't do all of them by yourself. If you are the only person you ask for help. Or bringing boxes from the tenth floor to the first floor—you can't do that yourself, two people are better.

Another two-year support worker describes regular cooperation in customer service when sales goals are not at stake (since support staff have none): “the experience of the coworkers—you work together. If they are helping a customer and don't have knowledge about a certain product, I can bring that assistance to them.” “When it comes to cleaning,” says a first-year associate, “your manager will put people on certain areas so you have to coordinate with them in that sense, and when it comes to breaks you also have to coordinate that with each other.” And when describing how daily maintenance work is accomplished in her department, a four-year associate affirms that “even when Macy's doesn't have a supervisor on our floor we still join together and do what we have to do; we get things done the same way.”

If a department is clean and the items easy to find, this improves everyone's ability to make sales and achieve goals. “I sell better if my house is in order,” says an eight-year commissioned associate, “it's good to have things neat because people come in and they think it's their right that someone else will do it, I mean it's part of the service industry.” Keeping things neat and orderly is thus a collective good that associates and specialists have a common interest in maintaining; given the expansion of maintenance functions expected of sales staff, the introduction of sales goals indirectly provides impetus for cooperation in non-selling tasks. An impetus, however, is not an actuality, as many full-time salespersons note: “the part timers, they would just like to ring and make their goal and not clean up. But most of the full-timers they want to see the department clean” (5-year full-time specialist). A four-year specialist from a neighboring department describes how non-selling work is, in fact, disincentivized by management:

The time you are outside the register they call ‘unproductive hours’ which means you are not selling, you are doing something that helps the sale but is called unproductive. Only the time you are ringing, that's a ‘productive hour’. So we have to ask a favor of the manager to give us ‘unproductive hours’, otherwise that will be a minus from our scorecard and we will have to balance that time with the time we ring.

Competition over who will perform these ‘unproductive’ functions creates a further source of friction among sales workers, in addition to goal attainment, that remains unresolved in many Macy’s departments.

Control

The concepts of managerial control and its converse, worker autonomy, are more ambiguous than they may at first appear. To understand their content for a given work environment it is first necessary to conceptualize the labor process as a whole, then empirically determine where and with what degrees of freedom frontline workers and managers, respectively, fit in. The organization of corporate retail is complex: from supplier to consumer, a variety of distributive workers, including salespersons, execute myriad intermediary tasks. What and how much to buy, when to ship, when to stock, when and how to display, how much to charge, etc.—almost all of this is arranged by corporate management (and vendors) before the salesperson ever begins work. The bandwidth of decision-making for 21st century retail employees has thus narrowed dramatically from that of the independent shopkeeper, the pre- or petty-capitalist benchmark against which Burawoy (1978) believes contemporary occupations should ultimately be judged.

Given this general conception of the retail labor process, which holds as much for Macy’s as for Target, it can be seen that sales-floor workers enter the picture after much has been decided at the corporate, regional or store levels of management. Concerning those tasks

remaining to them—customer service, final sales, stocking and maintaining displays—the control/autonomy question reduces to the following two sub-questions: 1) to what extent are workers' input tasks, such as attendance, folding clothes and approaching customers, self- or other-directed? 2) with what precision, achievability and consequences are worker outputs (sales, clean departments) determined and measured by management? I argue that while Macy's workers maintain considerable autonomy on the selling floor, their sales output is controlled in increasingly rigid fashion by central management. The consequences for workers' job security—i.e. threat of job loss for low goal attainment—have only been mitigated by the presence of an active union.

In the daily distribution of tasks, most workers note a strong degree of self-direction:

Q: Who gives out tasks in the morning? Does your manager say 'do this or that'?

A: Normally we have our routine, the routine is come in, make sure the rods are going, but if something else needs to be different our manager will come over and she will let us know. (4-year associate)

A six-year specialist states that "if I see [my manager] for five minutes during a shift, that could be a lot. They generally stay inside the firm, behind closed doors." A two-year support worker says that while in his first three months either a manager or a more senior sales worker would determine his tasks throughout the day, "now no one has to tell us anything. As soon as you can and you know what to do, if you are working here for at least three months." "We do our own thing," says a five-year specialist, "they tell us what to do but if we don't feel like doing it we don't really do it."

Direct oversight, however, is not completely absent: "sometimes you see them lurking when you're doing a sale; they're watching what you do to give you feedback or see how you are at selling" (2-year commissioned associate). A one-year brand specialist describes managers' attempts to discourage socializing and direct workers back to maintenance or selling tasks:

A: When I started working there they were like, 'oh, you're clumping' and I was like, 'what is that'? Clumping is when people stand together and talk. But it's not clumping when you [managers] do it, when you stand together with an associate and talk, but when associates do it with each other it's clumping so I'm like, alright!

Q: So do they walk through the floor and say 'don't do that'?

A: Yeah, what they do is they indicate.

Others highlight the oversight functions carried out by external vendors rather than internal Macy's managers. "My coordinator," says a second-year support worker, "is the person that works for a certain vendor. They are usually harder on me than the managers, because they work for the brand, they have their bosses and need to make sure everything is good." Another support worker for a branded area believes that "Macy's managers become like supervisors" for brand vendors and coordinators, noting that they report to her brand employer if she is late. The first support worker quoted before also describes his formal exclusion from floor design: "they don't use my feedback," he says, "in my section there is a book on how the whole floor layout should look. When we first get new merchandise they give you a book and they want these certain items here and those certain items there."

A two-year associate notes a degree of managerial favoritism in the application of direct control:

Q: So who gets stuck with the cleaning?

A: Whoever the manager feels he could tell to do it to. He'll tell some of them to do it and they will wait till you walk away then be back at the register making their goal.

This impression is confirmed by the experience of the 31-year associate encountered earlier:

Q: What's the relationship with managers like?

A: It depends, one kid they pick on him. It's personal, it's me against you, but I've been there so long that it's nothing really. And it depends on if they [managers] are [pro-]union or anti-union, because they will pick on you. Three years ago there was this lady, oh she didn't want unions, unions, unions, so she was busting my chops like mad. Then she was fired for stealing! Most of the people get along but there are people that pick on you. So they usually go after the younger people.

Employee attendance and behavior are also formally monitored through a point system: “you get a point for being late, three points for calling out, and there are also behavioral write-ups and stuff, you need fifteen of them to get a written warning, it's ridiculous,” says a second-year assistant manager in a vendor-leased department. Employees’ points are wiped clean every three months, however, and this supervisor believes this is due to union power: “I have associates who come late every single day but nothing ever happens when you're in a union store.” “Their union is pretty strong,” he states, “so it's almost impossible to get somebody fired unless they are sexually harassing or something.”

The degree of task autonomy for sales floor workers, then, is significant if uneven and in some cases—for newer or younger workers—arbitrarily denied. Experienced associates are relatively free from direct oversight of inputs and given management’s own promotion of the MAGIC sales method, this makes sense: salespersons require freedom to pursue customer wishes and ‘inspire’ them ‘to buy’ more.²⁰

But if inputs such as customer interaction, area maintenance and attendance are only loosely controlled at Macy’s, sales outputs are tightly monitored through the goals system. Measurement consists of four components which, when combined with any point deductions for lateness, call-outs or deviant behavior (such as being out of dress code, arguing with coworkers or managers), comprise each salesperson’s weekly scorecard. Scorecards, which consist of 100 possible points, are calculated “weekly, monthly and yearly, and all will add to your [annual] review” (4-year specialist). The four sales measurements are 1) total daily, weekly, etc. sales and whether they met the relevant goal; 2) average sales per hour, day, week, etc.; 3) the number of items sold per customer transaction (IPT); and 4) the number of Macy’s credit cards opened.

²⁰ As a researcher, it is worth noting, workers at Macy’s were much easier to engage in informal sales-floor discussions than those Target, who often looked around and kept conversation to a minimum after learning I was not a customer.

Sales goals are generated by store management based on the previous year's sales for that day "plus an incremental increase," according to Ken Bordieri, president of Local 1-S, the union representing New York City Macy's workers. A first-year commissioned associate elaborates:

It depends on what shift you're working. If you're working on a Saturday your goal might be higher than on a Monday. If it's a busy day you will get a higher goal, if you're working the morning shift you will get a smaller goal compared to a later shift because later on in the day it'll pick up. And it depends how many hours you work, but the goal basically equals out between everybody working at the counter, so the counter also has one goal, which Macy's gives to us.

The four-year non-commissioned specialist, however, says that in his department "one person on the same day might have a \$1,500 goal, and the other person a \$1,100 goal." Sales and other metrics are measured when an associate or specialist rings up a customer, after signing onto the register with a personal identification number.

Full-time salespersons are expected to open three and part-timers two Macy's credit cards per week; depending on the department, the expected items per transaction (IPT) are either two or three. When asked whether she thought sales goals were realistic, a one-year specialist responds that "sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't. I'm only at 15 percent of my goal for today and I've been here since 9:45" when it was currently 1 pm. Asked the same question, a first-year associate replies:

Yes, but for the month of January it was really really slow because nobody was shopping. And they were giving us these really high goals and nobody was making them, people were making like 50 percent of them. So they understand that there's not much you can do in that situation.

If the goal for a given day is too high, echoes a five-year specialist, "then there is nothing you can do. You make it up on another day if you ring like 200 percent, which you can. We strive every day, I strive every day to make my goal." Items that are later returned are also deducted from salespersons' totals, which can retroactively affect goal attainment. That's why a one-year

specialist's "manager says to ring about 130 percent of your goal to cater for the returns." And concerning credit-card goals, an 18-year specialist and shop steward notes that these do not remain stable, but are ratcheted up with regular attainment: "if you open one today, tomorrow they expect two; if you open two, then the next day they expect four, that's how the metrics are." Though its prevalence in Macy's stores is unknown, this lack of "good sportsmanship," to use Stinchcombe's (1990, 295) term, represents a return to classic Taylorist methods of output maximization.

The impact of goal attainment, scorecards and annual reviews on workers' pay and job security are less at the few unionized Macy's than at their non-union counterparts:

Q: Could someone be demoted or punished on the basis of these reviews?

A: No. In the non-union stores, yes. That's one of the things that they were trying to push during the negotiations, that we should be able to demote someone who's not making their goals. Say you have people in the specialist program who say the goals are too high and want to go back where they came from. Now they get to keep whatever amount they were given as a promotion, the extra dollar, but they were pushing for people to lose that incentive once they go back if it's because they cannot make their goal. (18-year specialist and shop steward)

Annual reviews affect annual raises, but "even if you make the metrics you just get like \$0.05 or \$0.10; even when you are really good you only get \$0.15" (*ibid*). Promotion or transfer opportunities, however, are affected:

If your scorecard is not in the 70-100 point range your chances of getting a promotion are very minimal because at the end of the day they use this scorecard system to promote you. If you wanted to go to another department, the manager is not interested in how well you look or how nice you are, she wants to look at your scorecard because she doesn't want to lose in her department, she wants someone who can perform well. (1st-year specialist)

Sales workers' autonomy with regard to output, then, is hardly discernible: associates and specialists do not control how their goals are set, and control only certain aspects of whether they attain them. On a slow day, for instance, a given goal may be impossible to make, or even on a

busy day, when a goal is met or exceeded, this could later be undone by customer returns, an act beyond the salesperson's influence. The human impact of this mechanism is best left to the workers themselves:

We have sales goals that we have to meet every day, and we don't really get anything for making it. Nobody gets fired for not making it, but just as a human being you want to make your goal. We don't really have any incentive, none other than that I like to do well where I work. So it's a personal incentive. (2-year associate)

That goals system? It's a mess. They need to get rid of it. For some associates the goal system does affect how they treat customers, because they put all their emphasis on making sure they make their goal. So how does that work? I'll tell you how it works, nobody thinks about cleaning up. Nobody thinks about the customers, they only think about their goals. That's it. (2-year associate)

The Employment Relationship

I now consider the extrinsic aspects of work at Macy's: pay, benefits and job security, working conditions and managerial style. In addition to these, I also analyze the role and impact of Local 1-S on workplace dynamics in New York Macy's stores. At Macy's, pay and benefit provision are low—on a level with most other retailers—job security is relatively high, working conditions uneven and supervisory styles are an evolving mix of authoritarianism and team-based 'collaboration'. Unionization plays a key role in structuring these aspects, particularly job security and managerial style.

Pay, Benefits and Job Security

One prominent estimate of the current living wage for a single adult in New York City is \$12.75, assuming full-time, year-round employment; for a family of four with two adults and two children it is \$22.32 (Glasmeier 2012). Of the 31 Macy's workers interviewed, only one, the 31-year sales associate, earned slightly more than the living wage threshold for a family of four.

Almost two thirds (20) earned less than the living wage for a single adult, and six of these worked part-time rather than full-time. The lowest current wage of any worker interviewed was \$8.00 an hour, and several reported starting wages of \$7.50, which was confirmed by the Local 1-S President as “the lowest current entry-level wage” at Macy’s (New York’s minimum wage was \$7.25 throughout the period of study). Differentials between non-commissioned specialists, associates and support workers were minimal, with some associates and support workers in fact earning more (\$10 or \$11 per hour) than some specialists (\$9). Higher wage rates were found either among those with a lot of seniority (though one ten-year specialist reported an hourly rate of only \$11), or among commissioned salespersons, who reported a base pay of \$8 an hour (\$300 for a full-time Macy’s week) and weekly commissions ranging anywhere from \$150 in slow seasons to \$500 during the holidays (thus a range in hourly pay from \$12 to \$21.33).²¹

To put these rates in perspective, the average hourly wage of all workers in the four non-Manhattan boroughs of New York City was \$20.46 in 2012 (based on a 40-hour week—U.S. BLS 2012),²² and that of all retail employees in the five boroughs (including first-level supervisors) was \$13.43 using merged and inflation-adjusted data for 2003-2011 (Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau). The majority of Macy’s interviewees earned less than \$12.75 an hour, which is below the common two-thirds cut-off (\$13.64 for the non-Manhattan average wage) for “low-wages” (Appelbaum *et al.* 2006; Gautié and Schmitt 2010).²³ Though

²¹ Commissioned workers in both the men’s suits and women’s shoe departments (overwhelmingly male) stated that they earned 8.6 percent commission on all sales over a certain threshold; for all sales below this threshold, however, they receive no commission: “What they have is something called the draw: I have to make a certain quota before I can actually start making my own commission money. So let’s say one week I sell about \$10,000 Sunday through Friday and my quota was roughly \$3300, so everything after \$3300, they will break that down into commission percentage and add it onto my paycheck.” (2-year commissioned shoe salesman).

²² The figure for Manhattan alone was nearly triple this, thus its inclusion greatly skews (i.e. more than doubles) the city-wide average.

²³ “Low-wage” thresholds are typically calculated from median, rather than average wages, since averages are often skewed upward by a few high-earning individuals. But even if we subtract \$100 from the average weekly wage to approximate an unknown median, this still leaves a weekly two-thirds threshold of \$478, which is exactly the

store-wide wage rates were not provided—either by union or company officials—discussion with participants gave no indication that they were an especially underpaid sample. Thus working at Macy's, for many individuals, is a low-wage endeavor.

When I asked participants how they make ends meet on such pay in one of the country's most expensive cities, I got a variety of responses, largely dependent on workers' personal situations outside of work. A two-year commissioned saleswoman, one of the higher-paid categories of sales staff, described the difficulties of supporting herself and her daughter:

A: It's a constant [base] salary a week so I mean you can get used to not taking care of stuff, just taking care of the minimum, but for rent you have to save up for maybe three weeks just to make it and if one week you do less [commissioned sales] then you debate whether you should put some of that towards rent. It's that level of living.

Q: What proportion of your income would you say goes towards rent?

A: What proportion goes towards rent? I think that's all I'm really paying. I live at my father's house. If I was in the world I wouldn't be able to pay it.

A four-year non-commissioned associate, who works full-time at Macy's and lives by herself, has to rely on public assistance to afford housing:

I make \$9.15 an hour. I can't get Medicaid because I make too much for Medicaid, so I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't. The best I can do is drop some of my hours and go part-time. And if I go part-time I still got other bills in life that I have to pay, so now I'm gonna have to depend on the city to help me. Believe it or not, I already have the city helping me pay my rent and everything. They pay me half and I appreciate that, I have to pay the other half because I'm working.

A two-year commissioned salesman states that “if you have a family to provide for you are going to take it [commissions] pretty serious.” To him, however, “it's just another job to have while I'm in college. I'm still living at home so it's just something to keep money in my personal pocket.”

When it comes to benefit provision, Macy's is not particularly generous either. According to the president of Local 1-S, roughly half of the union's 4,000 members at four New York Macy's stores are eligible for company-provided health insurance, but only half of those—about

weekly gross if one earned \$12.75 and worked 37.5 hours. Two-thirds of those interviewed thus still fall below this hypothetical two-thirds cut-off.

1,000 workers—are actually enrolled in the plan. The reason? “It really sucks and is really expensive” (Bordieri). Since the 1994 contract—re-opened to extract concessions following Macy’s 1993 bankruptcy—workers have contributed towards the health plan if enrolled; since the concessionary 1999 contract, “workers have been asked to pay 50 percent or even 54 percent in some cases” (*ibid*). Three respondents, all of them single, reported *weekly* premiums of \$60 on the company’s plan. The result is that many either forego health insurance altogether or seek it elsewhere, like this eleven-year part-time associate who has a teenage son:

They do have a health plan for part-timers but it's far too expensive for me. And they definitely have one for full-time because that was one of the issues during the [contract] negotiations. But like so many other companies, they are either going up or cutting something, so it was too expensive for me, I do better looking for myself outside.

Or the four-year full-time associate encountered earlier:

You can have health insurance with Macy's, but it's too expensive. Maybe it's not too expensive for the lady who's been working there for nine or eight years, 'cause she's not getting what I'm getting an hour. For me, because I am single, it's \$59.68 the last time I read on the paper and that's a week, not a month, that's the crazy part. And it doesn't even include dental, so I don't even know if it pays for your medicine, and that's a little steep for a person who's making \$9.15 an hour—that's a big part of my salary.

But one ‘lady’ who had been working there for *ten* years as a specialist also thinks “health insurance at Macy's is terrible, it sucks, it's really high. I tried to get Medicaid but they denied me.” Again, one’s personal situation makes a difference, such as for this two-associate who retired from the Metropolitan Transit Authority and receives health coverage therefrom:

“Medical coverage is a big issue for retail—what they are offering is too high. Thank God for transit!”

With respect to job security, this is where the union has a bigger impact. The current 1-S contract has a “five-year wage and salary guarantee” which is essentially a seniority clause

stipulating that in the event of lay-offs, any covered worker²⁴ with at least five years at the company is guaranteed a job, possibly in a different department, but at the same rate of pay.

Managers must follow a lengthy procedure of verbal and written warnings before they can fire workers. The same assistant manager quoted before says of the sales staff under him:

They know Macy's is not going to fire them. Sometimes we [lease department] give out separate schedules for them to follow but then when it comes to lateness they will not get knocked down. It has to be in the Macy's schedule for them to get written up, for points to be counted on them. So that's extremely hard for us.

A one-year associate from the same department concurs: “yea as long as you're not crazy, like not always calling out or always late, it could take a year and a half to two years to actually get fired.” Stealing, however, is one thing for which frontline staff can be summarily terminated. “After five years you are guaranteed a job,” says a first-year specialist, “but they have fired people for stealing.” A second-year support worker states “I’m in the union; they can't fire me unless I'm stealing or coming late every day.”

A final aspect of job security, so crucial at Target and other big-box retailers, is security of hours. A full-time week at Macy’s is 37.5 hours, which is guaranteed for all those hired or promoted to this status (in my sample, 20 out of 30 non-supervisory workers). Below this are three other categories with different ranges of guaranteed weekly hours: part-time (20-35 hours), short-hour (12-20 hours) and on-call (fluctuating). On-call workers are the most precariously employed at Macy’s and, in addition to seasonal temporary staff (employed for 90 days or less), are not in the union. The maintenance of these differential categories—non-existent at Target—and hence, security of hours, is also due in large part to the union. In 2011 management proposed a shortening of guaranteed full-time hours from 37.5 to 28, an issue which “got people out on the street” for two pre-negotiation rallies (Bordieri). This proposal was later removed from Macy’s

²⁴ This category includes all frontline sales-floor workers who have been employed for at least three months in the four stores, since I-S has a closed-shop agreement.

bargaining agenda and the 37.5-hour week upheld in the new contract. A long-term strategy is evident, however, in management's gradual reduction of full-time employees. According to several long-time workers, Macy's has increased its hiring of short-hour workers, and Bordieri believes that the company's "long-term goal is no guaranteed full-time hours." "But this operation," he believes, "is difficult to run without full-time staff."

In the fields of pay and benefits, many Macy's workers are thus near the bottom of the legal range for New York City, though not those with greater seniority or in higher-paying commissioned departments.²⁵ As will be seen in the next chapter, Macy's lowest starting wage—\$7.50 per hour—is in fact \$2 below the \$9.50 entry wage at non-union Target stores in New York City. When questioned, Local 1-S president Bordieri concedes this fact, stating that "the contract has no guaranteed starting wage"; although they bargained for it in the last two contract rounds (2011 and 2006), the union "was unable to get it." With regard to job security, however, unionized Macy's workers have considerable protection against arbitrary dismissal and hour fluctuation—guarantees absent at Target. Perhaps for these reasons it is not uncommon to encounter workers at New York Macy's stores with five, ten or even twenty years of service while job tenures at neighboring Target stores are uniformly shorter.

Working Conditions

In the narrow sense intended here, working conditions refer to the pleasantness or unpleasantness of work arrangements and routines. Primarily, this concerns workers' physical or psychological deprivation, but also the extent to which the work environment supports or hinders the completion of tasks. Macy's workers describe sources of deprivation endemic to many

²⁵ Below this legal range there is also a substantial group in New York, primarily composed of undocumented immigrants (see Milkman, Gonzalez and Ikeler 2012).

frontline service jobs, such as constant standing and instances of customer abuse, as well as erratic scheduling, under-staffed or chaotically arranged sales floors and unsanitary facilities. But conditions are not entirely negative, as many enjoy talking with customers and some find flexible scheduling suited to their needs. In what follows, I focus on physical demands, customer interaction, store cleanliness, staffing levels and scheduling as key aspects of the Macy's work environment.

"I like working with people," relates a two-year, full-time associate in her early-60's,

I just don't want to be doing this till I'm 66. It gets very physical, this is a very physical job. Even the young people have callouses; I thought I was the only one. I've got 'em on my feet. I have these shoes, they worked for a little while and then my feet just started hurting again. I went to the foot doctor and he gave me a foot check-up. This here is a really physical job; I wouldn't recommend it for seniors unless it's part-time, because it's too much pain. Me personally, I can't do another four years in retail. (2-year full-time associate)

A two-year specialist in her late-20's also finds that "the biggest challenges I face working in retail is the strenuous hours and the consistency of standing up all day"; and a two-year associate in her 50's simply states "yeah, it's tough to be on your feet." The experience of an 18-year-old, first-year support worker is that

you are always moving around, always cleaning things so you realize customers are the worst. They just throw stuff on the ground, they put it in different places and you have to put it all back. It's been alright but sometimes it's very tiring and very crude. By the end it's quite a long day.

The physicality of retail and other frontline service jobs is a common-enough thread in many recent accounts, but one less often examined than the theatrics or psycho-social dynamics of service provision. As Steven H. Lopez notes, "the *materiality of service work* has been underemphasized... Work involving customers is not simply about feeling, it is a physically constituted social reality involving interacting bodies" (2010, 263; emphasis in original). The experiences of several Macy's workers only emphasize this further: that the demands of

maintaining floor displays, approaching customers, finding items for them and the like are in no way superfluous, but an inherent part of sales-floor work that can be a source of discomfort on the job.

Customer abuse, however, is a less salient source of discomfort at Macy's. While most workers readily give examples of particularly "difficult," "rude," or "crazy" customers, they often describe these as exceptions to the norm. "Yeah, I get a lot of crazy customers," says a first-year male associate in a women's department, "but it wouldn't be severe like, 'oh my God, I'm going to blow this Macy's up,' just like they are frustrated." The young support worker quoted above finds that "some [customers] are really easy to work with, some don't want to be helped at all, some can be really rude. It all depends on how you observe people, whether they want you to approach them or not—that helps." And an exchange with an eleven-year part-time associate reinforces this depiction:

Q: Have you ever had difficult customers?

A: I mean I've had some, but I have patience so I usually follow the rules. It's a rare moment for an associate to do or say something [negative], though I do have some coworkers who snap back [at customers], and then it might turn into something, but I would say it's mostly positive.

Some sources of discomfort, however, are specific to Macy's stores. "I really don't like their facilities," says the one-year assistant manager,

The locker room has rats in it on 34th St. It's probably the biggest retail store in the world and they have rats in the locker rooms. The cafeteria is not too good, it's horrible, it smells in there. The bathrooms too, it's not clean in there, the locker rooms suck. There's a lot of people going in and out of there so I guess that's the reason but they could do a lot more for their associates that they don't.

A two-year saleswoman notes a similar problem at a different location: "They had a rat problem, real bad. They was on it, but in the meantime where I work there was a bad odor—they found three dead rodents but the odor is still there. I said, you know what? The odor can stay because

I'm leaving.” And a five-year specialist in a men’s clothing department thinks “we need a hand sanitizer or something at the register because we touch money, and the customers try on things and we touch it. What if they have a skin disease and they put it back on the floor?”

On a personal level these issues irritate, but uncleanliness and general disorganization can also get in the way of sales. “To me one of the flaws in the system,” states a two-year associate who previously worked as a Target manager, “is that there is just merchandise everywhere, it's overwhelming how much stuff is in the hallways that the customers can't get at. We don't know where it is and it's got to be affecting sales, big-time.” “If the shop is really messy,” says a first-year specialist, “then I will clean a lot. I feel like if your shop is messy, who wants to shop there? It doesn't look right.” Keeping a ‘clean shop’ is increasingly difficult due to another aspect of Macy’s work arrangements: staffing levels.

It's a lot when one person is going in and trying on six bras and then comes back with another six bras and another six bras. Today there was supposed to be four of us in, but sometimes you are short-staffed and there's only two of you until 2:30 and then the crowd comes in. (4-year associate)

Many sales floor workers complained of short-staffing and this again is not uncommon in low-wage service industries (see, e.g. Lopez 2006). Similarly to the tactic of having salespersons perform more and more ancillary tasks, short-staffing benefits management by reducing overall labor costs, but it produces problematic working conditions and also problems for customers.

“Our store is struggling for customer service,” remarks a ten-year specialist,

customers are sick and tired of the long lines. We have no control over that—operations controls how many hours, how many staff they have on a certain floor. Customers are always complaining that we don't have enough staffing because the workload is too much sometimes for us and we only have two hands.

To a first-year specialist, “you are supposed to help the customers, but when you are short-staffed and just sitting at the register, you can't really help the customers unless they come over

and ask.” And a two-year commissioned saleswoman finds that while support workers used to set-up displays in the mornings before customers arrived, “now it's extending all day, people are shuffling around with racks, leaving them in your area and it's a visual thing.” The overall extent of short-staffing is hard to estimate, but its frequent mention by workers in both commissioned and non-commissioned departments suggest its prevalence at Macy's.

A final noteworthy aspect of working conditions at Macy's is scheduling. Scheduling as such is distinct from security of hours. Within a full-time, part-time or short-hour framework, days of work and shift times can be arranged differently, and the pattern of such arrangement can impact the experience of work itself and one's work-life balance (see Lambert 2008). At Macy's, workers receive schedules two weeks in advance, and following the 2011 contract, the arrangement of shifts has moved from being purely management-determined to being partly worker-determined at all stores save the 34th Street flagship. A ten-year specialist describes this new initiative, called “my schedule”:

Right now there is a thing called “my schedule”: you can make your own schedule in the system. Managers aren't making schedules anymore. “My schedule plus” is making our own schedule. So you would go to the system and tell it when you are available. If you are going to school? Perfect place to work, Macy's. Because you can put it in the system, tell the system what days you are available. Night shift, dayshift, I am not be able to work on a Wednesday morning but I will be able to work in the afternoon—to minimize the number of call-outs.

An eight-year associate and shop steward, however, is more cynical:

What it really means is that for example if I'm scheduled to work seven and a half hours every day, and I started coming in for the next six months maybe 35 hours instead of 37.5, that means my vacation [time basis] goes down to 35 hours instead of 37. We didn't want it because we knew that the company is using this to chip away at the health insurance.

Bordieri notes the acceptance of “my schedule” in the 2011 contract as a concession to management demands for increased flexibility: “workers will log into some kind of online

system,” he says, “and try and choose their hours. Eventually management would like workers to be doing it on their smartphones.”

Scheduling flexibility is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there are those for whom “flexibility, being available for your family and still being able to be here at work and deal with life’s issues—that works for me” (11-year part-time associate). On the other, there are those who “are not able to breathe, you are just a wreck. In terms of scheduling there is no family life. Last night I worked until eleven and I had to be here at nine o’clock this morning for a seminar” (2-year full-time commissioned associate). According to a seven-year associate and shop steward,

Scheduling is the biggest problem because it's not contractual. There are very grueling shifts: you could work 9:00 to 6:15 or 9:45 to 6:15. So say you live in the Bronx, you're not getting home until 8:00 or 8:30 at night and then the next day and have to come in at 9:45. And everyone has to work two weeknights until 10 and then the next day you have to come back at 9:45—there’s no balance to your schedule. It's really hard on people.

For those in college or without significant family commitments, flexible scheduling can sometimes be personally “convenient” (1-year commissioned associate) or allow opportunities for “good communication” with managers (2-year support worker). But even some younger, non-parent workers “kind of set [their] life around that schedule. Like right now we had to do this [interview] after work because I have no other free day” (2-year associate, mid-20s, no children).

Sales work at Macy’s is physically demanding; this takes a particular toll on older workers but also on younger ones, such as the 18-year-old ‘stock boy’ quoted earlier. Some of those interviewed mention unsanitary conditions—rats and germs, to be exact—but a more common refrain was frequent disarray of products and displays, brought on, it seems, by a tendency towards understaffing. Finally, while increasingly flexible scheduling benefits some, addressing their needs for family, class or leisure time, it is felt by others as a source of

instability and stress; several workers, as well as union officials, see it as a further attempt by management to erode full-time hours and attendant benefits. Thus the Macy's sales floor presents several sources of stress, and a few of fulfillment. The relative value of these and their impact on consciousness will become clearer still when contrasted with those at Target.

Managerial Style

It's hands-on and hands-off. The managers can mostly relate to the associates because most of them are younger, so they are around the same age as the associates. (2-year commissioned associate)

They are very prudent. When they are in a good mood they will come and help people with problems, but other times they will say 'figure it out' and they don't come at all. (5-year specialist)

The manager's role is to coach and work with you but I don't feel that they coach and work with us. They micromanage you; I think they misinterpret that. It's a tough environment—it's retail tough, retail tough.²⁶ (7-year associate and shop steward)

Supervision at Macy's is alternately formal and informal, rule-bound and arbitrary, supportive and authoritarian. The pluralism of experience among sales-floor workers makes it difficult to discern a hard and fast 'pattern' that can be neatly categorized as either 'harmonious' or 'adversarial'—the scalar poles of many scholarly discussions of this question (see e.g. Kochan *et al.* 1986). But after comparing reports from both long-time and newer employees against the backdrop of evolving worker-manager relations at unionized Macy's stores, a coherent trajectory, if not a single pattern emerges. It is this: several decades of collective bargaining generated a culture of distance and formality between managers and workers; since the concessionary 1994 and 1999 contracts, the basis of strong unionism and formalized relationships has been partially eroded through the expansion of part-time and younger workers;

²⁶ By which he means 'tough' compared to other retail employers. This respondent had previously worked for almost 20 years at a non-union grocery store in the south before coming to Macy's in New York.

in relation to this new group, managers pursue a more team-based, informal and ‘consensus’-oriented approach, but one that awkwardly coexists with a persistent adversarial culture. The resulting unevenness of tactics is thus the defining feature of managerial style in New York Macy’s stores.

“I’ve had my manager say something about my religion,” says an eight-year associate and shop steward, “and I filed a grievance on it and then he was like, ‘I didn’t say that!’” A two-year commissioned saleswoman has “never really been in this kind of environment; it is mostly negative feedback, stuff like you are not wearing your name tag or not wearing fully black. It’s relatively negative and it’s so often.” In response to a question about whether managers have a standard approach towards sales staff, the 31-year associate states “they try to, but it depends on the manager—they will just sit down and do their own thing but eventually it’s going to be, ‘tell him or her to do this’ and that’s it.” An exchange with a two-year associate who formerly worked at Target is particularly instructive:

Q: Is the relationship between managers and sales staff the same at Macy’s and Target?

A: No, because we are union and Target’s not—that’s a biggie. We almost went on strike; there’s these times when the contract is up every five years and I really thought we were going to walk—it was really kind of a rough week.

A three-year commissioned salesman notes that “there are very few people who go from a sales associate to being a manager. I think they want to keep that distance between manager and sales associate.” And the seven-year associate and shop steward quoted above finds the relationship “absolutely horrible. At this store there’s people working 20, 25, 40 years and they don’t get the respect of seniority, managers don’t honor that, they are terrible.” Statements of distance, formalism and occasional antagonism from managers are common among older workers, those in commissioned departments and especially among shop stewards. Such an approach is perhaps to be expected of those overseeing an older, unionized workforce in a firm that is ten percent and

an industry less than five percent unionized and increasingly composed of part-time, contingent employees. The aggressive, take-back bargaining pursued by Macy's against Local 1-S since the early 1990s is evidence of these larger contextual forces. As Ken Bordieri, Local 1-S president, puts it, "Macy's is in no way immune from the national employer offensive; it is not a 'friendly' company with regard to workers and unions—they are just as bad as everyone else."

But younger, non-commissioned workers often experience a different side of management. "My manager is wonderful, I like him," says a 20-year-old, one-year specialist. "He's really nice and understanding and is easy to work with," she continues, "he's the type that will help you go up and go someplace else—he will promote you." "Managers have been really helpful," remarks an 18-year-old stock worker about his entry into the job, "some of them can get under your skin, especially if they yell at you a lot but I haven't been yelled at a lot." A first-year associate in her early 20s finds her relationship with managers to be

pretty good, it's pretty casual and friendly. They want you to do your best but they can get a bit annoying because they sound like a broken record telling you to get star rewards, network customers, blah, blah, blah. I think they have to say some of that so it's pretty good; I don't really have complaints.

Many younger as well as older workers describe frequent department meetings and morning rallies where managers "try to keep us motivated, give us food or coffee, juice so that you could be motivated to be working, so that you could be yourself, be your *retail self*" (1st year associate, mid-20s; emphasis added). They note that managers give out praise, "recognition cards" and "Macy's money" (discount coupons) for high sales and other metrics at these meetings, as well as for regular use of the MAGIC method. "We usually have meetings," says a two-year associate, "and they tell you who met their goal, who was outstanding, stuff like that. And they give recognition, a recognition card—sort of a morale thing." The assistant manager encountered earlier, himself in his early 20s, describes his own approach with associates:

I speak with them, laugh with them, joke with them, but still make sure they are doing their job. They like interaction; we have to interact with associates because there are other managers who won't speak to them, just make sure they're on point at all times. I try to joke with them and say 'I used to be one of you guys, I know where you're coming from.'

Even for younger associates, however, managerial encounters are not always supportive, as the support worker's mention of yelling hinted at. Another two-year support worker and college student at first states "managers treat workers good, I think," but then describes the following episodes:

Recently one of my coworkers needed foot surgery and my manager was like, 'oh it's nothing, it's not that painful, just make sure you come to work on Friday.' When I used to work over here [different department] I had a fever one day and I threw up, the manager was still texting me, 'are you going to come?' They don't see anything else, they just want people to come in and work.

When asked if managers value his feedback, a different two-year support worker replies "not so much" and a first-year associate states that "sometimes the manager will be a little hard on some people even though you are still doing your job—they are a little more aggressive because they don't really know what you are doing during the day."

Taken together, these experiences indicate a move by management towards a style of supervision that can be described as team-based and at least superficially collaborative—a style, as chapter 3 shows, that is much more developed at Target. The implementation of such a pattern at Macy's, however, is limited by two countervailing forces: first, the structure and culture of unionism (besieged as it may be, but present nonetheless) and second, Macy's own quantification and individualization of the sales effort, with goals and their attainment a constant talking point and potential source of friction between first-level managers and frontline workers. The one-year specialist who finds her manager "wonderful" still notes that "if my scorecard is really low, my manager will pull me aside and say 'hey, what's going on?'"

Unionism at Macy's

A final aspect of the employment relationship at Macy's that has been discussed in passing but now deserves full attention is unionism. Unlike the majority of Macy's stores, those I investigated are unionized and have been so for many decades. The existence of a union contract and the presence of shop stewards in the organized stores affects the extrinsic and even some intrinsic aspects of sales-floor work (the exercise of control, in particular). But what kind of union is Local 1-S? Is it an activist organization with broad member involvement? Or is it just another 'business union' that delegates grievances and contract negotiations to paid staffers and has little shop-floor presence? Or is it somewhere in between? Moreover, what is the net effect of unionization on employment relations? The accounts of Macy's workers, including three shop stewards, point to an organization that is more than just a shell: Local 1-S maintains a network of elected shop stewards who, along with staff representatives, are seen by many rank-and-filers as both accessible and helpful when problems arise. Local 1-S also appears to have effectively upheld the integrity of its contracts and members' job security between negotiating rounds. The problem, however, as many members point out, is that the terms of those contracts with regard to wages, benefits and resistance to new scheduling and control schemes, is declining and low. Unionism at Macy's thus has a greater impact on managerial style and members' job security than on their pay, formal autonomy and working conditions.

"Sometimes the manager tells you to do things we are not supposed to do," says an eleven-year associate, "in that case you go to the shop steward who gives you a suggestion, then we will meet about it, talk about it, make a copy of it [the suggestion] and have the manager sign it, of course." "We kind of broke down the managers to where they have to respect us," states an

eight-year associate and shop steward, “instead of being more confrontational with workers they try to be more understanding, so our floor is pretty good.” On this woman’s floor, there are four shop stewards covering five departments. “It should be like five [shop stewards],” she says, “but it’s only four.” Some floors have only two, “and there were some times when some floors didn’t have any shop stewards” (*ibid*). Stewards are elected once a year at storewide meetings by the members in their respective departments. Workers in some departments don’t elect a steward because, according to the woman just quoted, “you have 50/50: 50 percent of people thinking that they care [about the union] and the other 50 percent that they don’t.” A different shop steward, himself a seven-year associate, describes how he came to fill that position:

After I worked here for a couple of years I started to have issues with management, like how they talk to you and I submitted my first grievance and had a shop steward represent me. I went over to the union [office], sat down with one of the union administrators and talked about the issues and they said, ‘why don’t you become a shop steward?’ And I was like, that’s too much work, I’m not interested, I just have issues. But I left and thought maybe I really should become a shop steward because I have so much experience in retail and I like to work with people. So I got voted in as a shop steward and with all the issues going on in my store all the time I became pro-union and pro-grievance—that issues need to be put on paper. I think I went too fast in the beginning, because I had to have other shop stewards on the floor help me. I feel that people come into work environments and don’t know their rights, don’t know how to exercise them, like when it comes to interrogation—Macy’s is a good environment to have learned this in.

The steward is a non-paid and purely voluntary position. They are the first line of defense for rank-and-file members against contract violations or arbitrary punishment. According to Ken Bordieri, “without shop stewards we don’t have an organization.” A two-year associate in a men’s department says that “every floor has a shop steward, at least one or two. If a manager is going to talk to you, then you have the option of taking a shop steward with you for protection.” A first-year specialist in a women’s department says that her steward “comes pretty much every day to see how we are doing, if we ever have a problem with the managers he will be there to help us or to tell them ‘this is not right’ or ‘you can’t do that.’” Stewards in each store meet on a

monthly basis and full-time union officials visit each store weekly to discuss current problems and possible responses with stewards and other members. In the run-up to the almost-strike of June 2011, the local held “two major rallies before the actual vote on whether we would strike. They also have a Facebook page for our local—it’s good communication, that’s how I knew I had to go to work or not, whether we were going to strike or not” (2-year associate, mid-20s). Another younger worker, at the store for less than a year, describes her contact with union representatives prior to the strike:

Well a lady [from the union] came in and told me they were having a meeting and somebody told me about the strike and I was excited because I was supposed to work that day so I was all, I guess I’ll stay home. Then I called my manager and he said, ‘get your ass here because the store is not closed.’ And I was like ok, so I don’t exactly know? (1st-year support worker)

And a first-year commissioned associate and college student finds that union membership, obtained after an initial 90-day probation period, makes a positive difference for her:

The union does hold a lot of power. I remember before I was in the union they [managers] used to give me crazy schedules and if I asked to change they would just be like, ‘oh why? Just work the hours’. But after I became part of the union, when they would do that I would go to the union and the union would call the managers right away and be like, ‘why are you giving her this schedule?’ As soon as they would get that call they would get scared and change the schedule right away. If you have any little issue you can always go to the union, they are always there to help you but you do have to pay union dues and stuff.

These experiences and many like them portray a union that is present in the daily life of Macy’s workers, with almost all of those interviewed aware of the stewards or officials they could contact if needed. But not all are equally confident in the ability of stewards or the union generally to solve their problems or positively impact shop-floor life. In response to a query about the most recent contract, a two-year support worker in his mid-20s believes “the main people I think it really affected were people who have been here fifteen or twenty years.” A first-year specialist has little interaction with or need for the union, she says, “because I came in, did

my work and worked hard and the manager recognized me, gave me recognition and it works for me.” And a four-year specialist finds that

Union people—they pop up when the election comes and after the election it’s hard to find them. You have to go to the head office, you have to talk to them, sometimes on the phone they are too busy and honestly, the union thing? I don’t like it. But yeah, sometimes it saves your job.

Several who expressed such sentiments were either younger and unfamiliar with unions, or older and convinced of their ability to bargain individually with, gain recognition from and achieve suitable arrangements with managers. Others, however, are clearly pro-union but fault Local 1-S for being inactive in certain areas. The 31-year associate, who served as a volunteer organizer in the union’s past attempts organize neighboring stores, states that “with us it’s alright but we could’ve had a better union.” Pressed about what he means, he responds: “They go too much with the company. We just got a contract in June and we got a \$0.65 raise for five years. Everything is for the company; they don’t care for workers anymore.” When asked about possible resistance to the new scorecard system, the seven-year associate and shop steward quoted earlier finds, “I don’t think the union has put up resistance. We put up resistance in shop steward meetings but I think that’s a component where the union has to allow Macy’s to run their business.” And the eight-year associate and shop steward thinks

We should’ve had a strike. I think they sold out. Because now they introduce My Schedule and that’s the thing that’s taking away people’s health insurance. We got a \$0.65 raise the first year, the second year it’s split, because 40 percent will get an additional \$0.20 at the end. So they screwed us—they knew we wanted a dollar [raise]. We didn’t get it. We could have but they sold us out.

Frustration with the lack of advance—or in fact, retreat—by the union on pay, benefits, scheduling and output control schemes co-exists alongside respect for its defense of job security and shop-floor autonomy. “The only thing that the union helps you with is your raise once a year

and it sucks. The raise really sucks,” says a ten-year specialist from a branded department. But “the union is a good thing,” she adds,

because it makes sure that we are secure with what they have to offer us—makes sure nobody abuses us, makes sure that the schedule is consistent, if you have a security issue, like you gave a friend of yours a discount manually, they protect us; if you are innocent, they can protect you.

The Workers Themselves

Macy’s workers have been present throughout my analysis but now deserve attention in their own right. Theoretical considerations alert us to a basic distinction between primary and secondary job seekers and the importance of these categories for the development of class consciousness. The first task here is thus to determine to what extent Macy’s workers fall into one or the other group. But a second and more fundamental goal of this section is to understand who the people are that work at Macy’s, how they came to work there, and how their own past experience and life situations inform their workplace expectations. This section is therefore divided into two parts: first, an assessment of workers’ backgrounds and second, an analysis of their expectations.

Backgrounds

I started at Macy’s because I was laid off at my security company and the rag shop I worked at closed down. Either unemployment was my option or go to work for Macy’s or any other job I got an interview for. And they hired me on the spot. (4-year associate, full-time, early 40s)

I graduated in July and I really don’t want to do design anymore so I took some time off and I needed work to support myself. So I just took the first job that hired me. (1st-year associate, full-time, early 20s)

I’m just working for metro card money because I go to school and I’m majoring in speech pathology. I want to go into my field; I don’t want to be doing this [long-term]. (1st-year associate, part-time, early 20s)

The paths to working at Macy's are as complex and numerous as the workers themselves. But among those interviewed, three general trajectories can be discerned, represented by the three workers quoted above. First are those, typically middle-aged, who don't have a four-year degree or equivalent credentials and work at Macy's because they have few better options. Second are those, often in their 20s but sometimes older who have a bachelor's or similar credentials, yet are unable to find jobs in their fields of training and work at Macy's as a stopgap solution. Third and finally are younger workers that are currently in college and/or have considerable family support. For the first two groups, Macy's wages are often their primary, or at least a very significant source of income; for the last group, Macy's income is almost completely secondary to basic expenses like rent and food. Several workers straddle these categories—such as the associate in his mid-40s who has worked in retail his whole life but now attends night school and plans to leave Macy's upon receiving his B.A.—but all can be located in one of these labor-market positions with relative ease. As past sections have discussed, Macy's seems to be pursuing a long-term shift towards a workforce composed more of the second and third, particularly college students, and fewer of the first type of worker.

Samantha²⁷ is a member of the first group. She has worked at Macy's full-time for five years, first as an associate, now as a specialist. In the early 1990s she emigrated from a Caribbean nation to join her husband in New York. "My husband was here and he asked me to come up so I came," she relates. "At first I babysat for quite a while because I didn't have my papers. Then this came along because in 2004 I got my green card." Samantha has an associate's degree from a community college and her husband is the superintendent of an apartment building. "I read a lot," she says, "I go to church. That's about it, I go from home to work to

²⁷ Not her real name—all further names are also pseudonyms.

church.” For Samantha, not working is not an option: earnings from Macy’s are a key part of her household income.

Kelly’s situation is similar, if more constrained financially and logistically. Born and raised in New York, she has worked at Macy’s as a full-time specialist for almost a year, is in her late 20s and has a three-year-old daughter. “Macy’s doesn’t really care for your needs,” she finds, “because if I need a day off to take my daughter somewhere, they will say okay, but then I still have to call out and miss a day’s pay.” Like Samantha, Kelly doesn’t have a four-year degree, but unlike her she also doesn’t have a partner with whom to combine resources. Living with extended family provides her with affordable housing and some childcare flexibility, but the situation is far from ideal: “sometimes when I get home my daughter is asleep and when I leave to go to work [in the morning] she’s still asleep, and she goes, ‘mommy I never see you!’” Workers with children but fewer childcare options than Kelly sometimes bring their kids to work, as a first-year support worker recounts:

Q: Do some of the people you work with have kids?

A: Yeah a lot of them do. Actually sometimes when they don’t have babysitters they bring them into the store.

Q: Really? Does the store offer childcare?

A: No. They just sit on the floor and hang out in the store. I’ve seen my vendor actually bring her grandkids. Not like babies, they were like seven years old; she brings them to the floor. They can’t go into the stock room but they can hang out on the floor. Especially in here, they can always go to McDonald’s [located in the store], they even help her size the floor. I have seen parents do it on more than one occasion.

Khalid also belongs to the first group, but would like to be part of the second. He has a bachelor’s degree in business from his home country of Bangladesh, but few U.S. employers or other institutions recognize it. “I already applied to CUNY [City University of New York] but they said I had to start from the beginning, they wouldn’t even give me any credits. So now I’m working, I’m evaluating—it’s a major process and I hate that. I’m just waiting.” Khalid is a full-

time, fourth-year specialist in his early 30s. He supports himself entirely from his Macy's income.

These three workers, despite differences in their personal situations and nationalities, are indicative of the first group of Macy's workers: lack of credentials excludes them from higher-paying office or public-sector work and they depend on Macy's wages for a large part of their income. Thirteen of those interviewed fell into this category, of whom five were born abroad. It is these and similar workers who most often become 'career' Macy's employees—or perhaps would have under the more generous terms of the pre-1994 union contract.

Eight of the workers I interviewed, however, fell into the intermediary second group: they have the credentials needed for higher-paying work, but were unable to find it and currently rely on Macy's wages as a primary source of income. Three of these eight workers were born abroad, the rest in the United States. David is a case in point. He graduated from a well-known private university with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. David went on to pursue a master's in the same subject but didn't complete the program and returned to New York one summer:

I started looking for jobs in electrical engineering but I couldn't find anything. Then sometime in December I got hired at Macy's as a seasonal for the holidays. They let me go in February, I did some other part-time jobs and then in September they called me back and hired me as a permanent [employee].

David has since worked at Macy's as a part-time associate in a commissioned sales department for three years.²⁸ According to him, most of the people in his department “are either full-time and it doesn't look like they're going anywhere else, or part-time workers that have a full-time job somewhere else.”

²⁸ Though, as he remarks, he often works full-time hours.

Allison is also in this group. She is a visual merchandiser²⁹ for Macy's and other area stores, but didn't plan it that way. "Well the economy is bad," she says, "I am a fashion designer but there is no fashion work. So I had to switch to merchandising." She moved to New York from Florida to study fashion, working periodically as a Macy's associate during college. "When there are no jobs in design, you kind of have the skill set to get a job in merchandising—that's like the back-up." Allison supports herself, with some family help, from the hourly wages in her "part-time to full-time to overtime" position.

William's situation is similar to Allison's and David's, but his wife has a steady public-sector job that also provides him with healthcare. Although he works as a full-time specialist and has for six years, he also goes to school and plans to become a teacher. Like Samantha, William is from the Caribbean: "I'm an immigrant so I don't—Macy's is the first place I came to. They are more flexible, I can get them to accommodate my schedule. And that's why a lot of college people go to retail, because they have a flexibility in the schedule." "Most of the people I associate with [at Macy's]," says William, "are college students." To him, this group is more averse to managers' team-building efforts: "There are some people that buy into that but we are not really looking for that. Just the work I've got to do to keep my job. That's it."

The remaining ten workers I interviewed all lived with parents who covered most of their basic expenses and were more often than not college students; only two of these workers were born outside the United States. These I characterize as group three, of whom Sylvia is one. Sylvia was born and raised in New York, has been a full-time specialist at Macy's for a little over a year, and is twenty years old. When not at work, she studies nursing. "You have a life,

²⁹ Visual merchandisers design and set-up in-store displays; they do not assist or ring-up customers and are not tied to specific departments.

you have expenses and bills,” she says, “and I can’t live off nine dollars an hour. I still live with my mom, so thank God for that.”

Hasan is also in college, studying business. His family emigrated from Bangladesh, but he was born in New York. He’s been a part-time support worker at Macy’s for almost two years, before which he “worked at a Subway sandwich store, I worked at a Haagen Dazs, and at a pharmacy for seven or eight months.” Hasan “miss[es] those days where I could wake up, lay in bed and take my time doing homework, those days are over for me. Since two years ago every time I wake up it’s either for school or work.” But working at Macy’s suits his present needs: there is “convenient scheduling, my manager understands me, everybody’s friendly. The pay is not much but it’s an easy job.” Hasan earns ten dollars an hour.

Matthew is 21 and doesn’t go to college; his main focus is music. “Sometimes it’s hard trying to balance your 40-hour week with your errands and your hobbies,” he says. Matthew lives with his mother who pays for rent and most necessities, though he “help[s] her pay the utilities and I have my own cell phone bill.” In contrast to other “associates in my store that support themselves on their \$300 a week check—I think that’s very common, people have roommates and then contribute their share of the rent,” Matthew “wouldn’t want to do that, I like being comfortable. I’ll live with my mom for a while until I get situated, then when I go to a better job I will move out.”

These snapshots into the lives of Macy’s workers illustrate three types of backgrounds and provide windows into the daily rhythms of contemporary retail workers in New York City. Workers come to Macy’s for a variety of reasons, but these can generally be reduced to long-term necessity (group one), short-term necessity (group two) or secondary income (group three).

In the next section I will show how these backgrounds inform individuals' expectations about their work and begin to glimpse elements of class consciousness.

Expectations

I have seen women that should be at home nursing but it's like a cautionary tale. It's us who have not set ourselves up through marriage or a good education or a secure career. This is where we could be in our 80s, shuffling in here, you know? You see them and you are like 'this is not gonna be me' but you are here and that same background is reflected in you. (2-year associate, mother, with a B.A.)

The most striking feature of workers' expectations about Macy's employment is that none of them—not even those who had been there for 10, 18 or 31 years—see their jobs as a long-term “career”. The 31-year associate, the longest-working and highest paid of all those interviewed, had this to say: “I'm just seeing if I can get the hell out of here. I can't take this crap anymore.” In his case, this ‘expectation’ is hard, if not impossible to disentangle from his years of experience in the store. This is not to paint a uniformly negative picture of Macy's work—on the contrary, most interviewees cited several aspects they enjoyed. But these were always provided in the context of plans to move on, to leave Macy's, go back to school, or find something “better”. Reading into these remarkably similar responses from workers of widely varying backgrounds leads to the conclusion that two factors predominate in producing such low expectations: low pay and an internalized social devaluation of retail work. In what follows I reproduce paradigmatic expectations from workers in each of the three groups previously described. I trace the causes of their expectations before drawing general conclusions about the hopes that Macy's workers bring with them to the sales floor and those they develop over time.

College students and younger workers supported by their families are perhaps the most predictable in their views. Many of them like working with people, the excitement of a big store

or the flexibility of retail, but few express interest in staying at Macy's or in retail long-term, and those who do make it conditional on becoming a manager. Asked why he began working at Macy's, the young assistant manager, himself a college student, states that he "was in retail because that's what I did throughout college and high school." He's "tired of working nights and weekends," however, and says that "after you get promoted to assistant manager there is not really much you can do after that. It's not for me," he says, "I'm not planning to stay with the company." He plans to change jobs and has accepted a position as a youth counselor at a non-profit organization, a path he hopes to pursue long-term. A first-year associate who is taking a semester off from college and lives with his parents has this to say:

Yeah I don't want to do [retail] long-term. I would do it but not as a sales associate, probably as something a little higher, that's why I would like to finish school so that I could do something that I would like to do more. Even though I like to do it, I don't see myself doing it twenty years from now.

Responses like these are common from those in group three: working at Macy's is something for 'the meantime'; it provides money and some work experience, but most have their sights on something else. The attitude of an 18-year-old support worker sums up this outlook: "For me I can't complain, I'm temporary, I'm about to go to college, I need some money. For the others that have this as a full-time job, I can't imagine how they do it because it's a lot of hours and the pay is not great."

Those in group two often have similar long-term outlooks to those in group three. Since they are by definition more dependent on their income and typically work longer hours, however, their short-term expectations about pay and benefits are usually greater. "A lot of people that work here have college degrees," says a two-year support worker, himself in college, "and they didn't get a job in their field so they're unmindful to do this until they find something better. I'm just doing this in the meantime so I can take care of my obligations; I'm holding out for

something better.” “You can’t make a living on what you earn here,” states a two-year associate and former Target manager who has a graduate degree in business,

people coming in and putting in their 40 hours here, they are working just as hard if not harder than those assholes on Wall Street, why shouldn’t they be able to pay the rent? Honestly, people here work their asses off and you can’t survive on what you make.

“It’s a cool place to work, I get cool merchandise,” she continues, “but sooner or later, I’m going to have to get a real job.” A full-time, first-year associate in her early twenties, who recently graduated with a bachelor’s in design but depends on Macy’s wages to pay her rent, states “I want to go back to school. I feel like my brain isn’t working as much as it should be; I’m not being challenged. But I will stay here until I find another job.” She thinks that managers “are inclined to hire people like women who they don’t have to pay as much.” In her opinion, “it’s not a hard job, it’s not hard to train people for it, so they’ll hire people like me.”

Comparing the expectations of secondary (group three) and ‘short-term’ primary (group two) workers, similarities are evident with regard to their long-term views of Macy’s work, but a subtle difference about what they expect from their jobs: group two workers show a heightened awareness of the gulf between a living wage and Macy’s wages, and some, such as the young woman quoted last, are more attuned to the use of sex-typing to create or maintain this. A typical group two worker, a college graduate in his mid-20s supporting himself on full-time associate wages, says of his job at Macy’s “I really don’t care. I like that they give me Macy’s money so I can buy clothes and whatnot, but they [managers] try to confuse their associates by giving them recognition and so forth. It doesn’t faze me though. Making eight dollars an hour, it’s really not a lot.” When asked about the almost-walkout of 2011, he states “I was all in for the strike.”

Among those in group one—long-term or compulsory primary workers—expectations are first and foremost that Macy’s work provide a livable income and social benefits. Beyond

this, however, and because many have longer tenures at the company, they often express additional desires for personal fulfillment and recognition of their abilities. An eleven-year associate in her mid-40s states that when she started,

I liked customer service and I love the clothes and the merchandise and interacting so it wasn't a problem for me. I mean I still enjoy it for the most part and I especially enjoy it when customers remember me or I remember them. But lately with our floor and how they have changed, I'm like, oh goodness. It's changed—it used to be nice, now it just seems like work.

She goes on to fault the new goals system, “the healthcare, the wages, the treatment” for her declining opinion of Macy’s: “they say we are supposed to be magical,” she says of management, “but sometimes we don't get the magic.” A two-year associate with two children expects more resources to handle her childcare needs: “I don’t have enough money to hire someone and she [younger daughter] needs a babysitter for part of the week. You’re failing in a sense because you are not able to set up education for them, so they might be reduced to this level also.” A ten-year, full-time specialist who supports herself and her son at first cites better pay as a key expectation: “I don’t make over 30 [thousand per year] and I have to shelter myself and my son. New York is very costly to live; it can be tough on us at times.” But as she describes her wish to leave Macy’s, more qualitative desires—or perhaps *frustrations*—come to the surface:

I am trying to come out of retail, you know? I say I’m trying, so that after Macy’s or if something else shows up you can try to get out. We start to get passionate about the job that we do so that’s why we stay here and do what we do. It’s like being a chef: you want to make the most fantastic dish, you want to look out and see the customer enjoying the dinner. For us it is the same for the product too. We will see what happens. It could be worse, you know?

This wish to have her work validated and respected is echoed by other group one workers, though not all share a similar pride. Another specialist, middle-aged and supporting herself, says

I see it as a job and I have to do it. I make the best of it and you just work hard. I can't afford to be picky because right now I'm looking for jobs but nothing is working out. For me it was an easy transition, there is no brainwork involved here, my brain has been on vacation for a long while. I'm not challenged.

The expectations of group one workers, while almost always including them, thus often go beyond instrumental wage-and-hour expectations typical of those in group two. When confronted with frontline sales work as a long-term option, older Macy's workers with less labor-market leverage try to imbue their tasks with meaning, and find this most readily in the caring aspects of their jobs. "It's really a good feeling," says a two-year associate, headed for retirement,

There was a girl who came in here for her ex-boyfriend and she says, 'do you think it's right to buy my ex-boyfriend a gift?' I said 'no! Guess what? That gift is not going to get him back.' She didn't buy the gift; she hugged me in the end. I always get a lot of hugs when I talk to certain people, yeah I get a lot of hugs. And I have talked to other people about various things, and they thanked me profusely. One guy when I first got here he said, 'my treat for lunch at Applebee's, I'm the manager there'. Because he liked my customer service.

This same woman, however, "never want[s] to see another retail job again. Not in this lifetime. I'm waiting until I get my Social Security and I'm gonna run!" Her reasons are the low pay, physical stress and managers' adversarial style.

While precise job expectations are clearly as numerous as the workers who hold them, I here find a rough congruence between the three background categories and general types of expectations. Those in group three typically want flexible, part-time hours and a fun, enjoyable workplace; they are not ambivalent about pay and benefits, but their expectations in these fields are less prominent since their basic needs are covered. Group two workers also want a conflict-free workplace but expect more in terms of pay, benefits and sufficient or predictable hours than their group three counterparts; their primary status in the labor market appears to engender greater dissatisfaction among them with Macy's conditions while their short-term status in retail

(as well as thwarted ambitions elsewhere) may lead them to either suppress these concerns, or else be more bold in advancing them, such as through union channels. Finally, group one workers have the most consistent expectations when it comes to bread-and-butter issues—they have few other labor market options, so Macy’s (and/or public assistance or family) has to provide it all, and is typically found lacking. But whereas group two and three workers tend to sublimate, or simply not mention, qualitative demands for meaningful work and recognition, these emerge fairly often from workers in group one. And here is where an internalized social devaluation of retail sales work becomes visible: secondary and ‘short-term’ primary workers, with their more purely instrumental expectations, seem to have accepted the widespread notion that retail work is “just a stepping stone” (1st-year merchandiser) to something else, that one should not even expect fulfillment from it—this is to be sought in more ‘career-type’ jobs. Long-term primary workers, on the other hand, are often struggling against this ‘common wisdom’: trying to give or find value in work that most others, including Macy’s management, devalue.

Summary

In this chapter I have described Macy’s as an arena of sales under pressure. It is an *arena of sales* because the structure of work is highly decentralized and stratified by department, product, price and ownership form (from fully Macy’s owned to fully leased and everything in between). Workers in one department may have little interaction with or even knowledge of those in others. And within departments, the act of selling is highly individualized and competitive, becoming more so with the recent introduction of the computerized goals system. The implementation of this system, combined with a declining number of support staff,

increasing tasks for salespersons, frequent understaffing and a shift away from primary and towards contingent secondary employees place workers *under pressure*.

Looking at intrinsic characteristics of work at Macy's I found a set of frontline sales tasks that are relatively complex and sometimes unpredictable when taken as a whole. The act of selling requires product knowledge and interpersonal ability, both of which seem to rise with the price of products. This use of personalized selling, embodied in management's promulgated MAGIC method, necessitates a fair amount of worker autonomy with regard to immediate task inputs. Output, however, is tightly controlled and monitored. The effect of this inverted Taylorism, as I call it, is on the one hand to increasingly individualize sales (sometimes counter-productively) while providing at least the basis for collectivization of department maintenance work. Since both tasks are required of the same set of workers, this produces tension.

As to extrinsic characteristics, pay and benefits are low, job security high (due to union presence), working conditions occasionally adverse and managerial style an uneven mix of authoritarian and supportive tactics with younger age and shorter job tenure often reasons for the application of the latter rather than the former. Local 1-S is a reasonably active union with a functioning network of shop stewards on the sales floors. Its impact on work structures and employment relations at Macy's is most evident in the areas of job security—including mitigation of the goals system's punitive consequences—and the upholding of a rule of law rather than arbitrary management. Its failures with regard to wage growth, benefits and scheduling are sources of weakness and partial de-legitimation among some rank-and-file members.

And with regard to worker characteristics, I found that Macy's workers typically belong to one of three groups—long-term primary (one), short-term primary (two) or true secondary

workers (three)—with some overlap and borderline cases. Employees' job-based expectations were shown to correlate roughly with their life- and labor-market situations: group three workers seek flexibility and a casual, enjoyable work environment; group two workers are more focused on wages, benefits and sustainable scheduling; and group three workers share these expectations but often also seek fulfillment from and recognition for their work at Macy's.

Chapter 3. Target: Maintaining the Flow, with a Smile

In the previous chapter I examined the workplace dynamics of Macy's, a strategically chosen example of the 'traditional' department store. Here I turn to this model's more successful competitor: the discount general merchandiser. Target serves as the chosen example for a number of reasons. First, because it is the second-largest and a steadily growing representative of its breed; second, because its stores, unlike those of top-ranked Walmart, are present in New York City, allowing for a more accurate comparison with Macy's regarding sales volume and worker, as well as customer, demographics; third and finally because although Walmart has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years, scholarly and otherwise, Target has been left largely unexamined and deserves further scrutiny.

My analysis proceeds parallel to that of Macy's: I begin with an overview of Target Corporation, followed by a brief discussion of the interview sample from which primary data are drawn and then proceed to examine workplace dynamics across intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics. Macy's, as documented above, exhibits an extreme individualization of the sales effort and a partial collectivization of maintenance tasks, which I referred to as *inverted Taylorism*; Target, by contrast, has systematically collectivized both, overlaying this functional structure with an explicitly 'cooperative' management style that includes forums for worker input. The overall organization of work at Target is what I call *service Toyotism*, a concept for which I first lay the empirical basis then explicate theoretically. Target hires younger workers than Macy's and two of the three stores I studied have a high density of Caribbean workers; this latter finding is important, since ethnic solidarity—and occasional exclusion—plays a role in determining the degree and form of class consciousness at these stores.

Target Corp.

After Walmart, Target is America's second largest general merchandiser and third largest retailer. In 2011, the company's U.S. sales reached almost \$70 billion—more than two-and-a-half times that of Macy's, the fifth-ranked general merchandiser and sixteenth-ranked retailer (NRF 2012). Two things differentiate Target from Macy's beyond its current sales volume: first, its recent growth, expanding from just under 400 U.S. stores in 1990 to over 1,700 in 2011, as against Macy's bankruptcy, takeover and growth-through-merger over this period; and second, its unique “upscale discount” or “cheap chic” format that sets it apart, not only from traditional department stores, but also from its largest competitors, Walmart and Kmart. As Walmart surpassed all other retailers during the 1990s—including Kmart, the former top dog—to become the largest private employer and arguably the template for low-wage “twenty-first century capitalism” (Lichtenstein 2006, 2009), Target grew in its shadow, meeting the same demand for low-cost goods but pursuing a more high-brow marketing strategy and cultivating a “socially responsible” image that eased its entry into urban and coastal regions where community groups have long resisted Walmart.³⁰ In what follows, I first trace the history of Target Corporation, which stretches back to 1902 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, then outline its current structure and explore the logic of its completely non-union operations.³¹

The year 1962 was pivotal for the rise of discount retailing. Within those twelve months all three of today's dominant national chains were founded: Walmart (until recently “Wal-Mart”), Kmart and Target. But while both Walmart and Kmart grew out of the sputtering five-and-dime business (the Arkansas seedlings of Sam Walton and the already-established S.S.

³⁰ A case in point is New York City, where as of 2013 there were seven Target but zero Walmart stores within the city limits—and not for Walmart's lack of trying.

³¹ Target's 2012 annual report states: “As of March 2012, none of our team members were working under collective bargaining agreements” (Target 2012a, 6).

Kresge chain, respectively) Target was an offshoot subsidiary of a traditional department store chain: Dayton's, founded in 1902 in Minneapolis, which became Dayton-Hudson's in 1969 (after a merger with Detroit-based Hudson's).

By the 1960s, Dayton's had a dominant presence in the twin cities area with a downtown flagship in Minneapolis, another in St. Paul and several suburban branch stores much like its contemporaries in other American cities, though its stores were never unionized. John F. Geisse, an upper-level manager at Dayton's, developed the model for a discount chain in the early 1960s, which caught the interest of the company's owners. They launched Geisse's model with him as head of the subsidiary on May 1, 1962, founding the first Target store in Roseville, Minnesota. By the end of that year there were four Target stores, and by 1967 there were nine, at which point the Dayton Company went public and became Dayton Corporation. In 1968, Geisse left the fledgling chain to found a similar one (Venture) for May Department Stores, but Target continued to grow, expanding to 49 stores and selling \$511 million worth of merchandise in 1975, at which point it surpassed Dayton-Hudson's traditional stores in revenue. Under the direction of Bob Ulrich, who became president of the Target division in 1984, the number of stores reached 500 by 1992, expanding deeper into the South and West, often through the purchase of smaller chains that were then re-branded as Target. In 1994 Ulrich, on the strength of Target's growth, became chairman and CEO of the entire Dayton-Hudson Corporation.³²

It was only in 2000, however, that "Dayton-Hudson" changed its name to "Target Corporation" and began serious expansion into the Northeast, including New York City. Four years later the re-named company sold off the remainder of its traditional stores (then under the Marshall Field's nameplate) to May, which, as is known, merged with Federated in 2005 to become Macy's, Inc. Thus in an odd twist of corporate evolution, many of the older Dayton-

³² This timeline is drawn from Rowley (2003) and Target Corporation's online history (Target 2012b).

Hudson stores whose revenues seeded the original expansion of Target—including Dayton’s flagships in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul—are today owned and operated by Macy’s.³³

The direct connection between Target and the more fashion-conscious world of department store retailing is cited by the firm’s apparent ghost writer, Laura Rowley, in her promotional book, *On Target*, as a prime reason for Target’s slicker look than its discount competitors and the firm’s orientation to what she calls the “upscale bargain hunter”:

They come for the merchandise. This—the stuff on the shelves—is where Target differs most significantly from competitors. It’s fun, distinctive, smart, sophisticated, even entertaining. There are a few names you may have heard before—Michael Graves, Mossimo, Calphalon, Todd Oldham, Stride Rite—but even if the names are unfamiliar, you know good design when you see it...It might be a department store, except everything is so cheap. (2003, 12)

Target stores are designed with wide aisles, easy-to-read signage and dropped ceilings without the warehouse-glare of fluorescent lights, unlike many Walmart and Kmart outlets. The merchandise includes plenty of low-priced items, like the \$18 coffee maker, but also their higher-priced variants, like the \$180 single-cup coffee maker with a digital clock and temperature control. Since the early 1990s, Target’s service has been explicitly geared towards evoking customer loyalty through “emotional branding”: in 1990 “Target executive Larry Gilpin decided to adopt Walt Disney Corporation’s training and service initiatives, and came up with the idea of calling customers ‘guests’ and workers ‘team members’” (Rowley 2003, 67-68).³⁴ The company increased staffing on its floors, instituting what it called “assisted self-service” instead of simply “self-service” (*ibid*).

³³ On January 2, 2013, the Macy’s branch in St. Paul announced it would close. Though plans for its replacement are not yet set, a forerunner in the debate among city planners is for a Target store to take its place (Duchscherer and Moore 2013)

³⁴ This gives added credence to what Alan Bryman has called the “Disneyization of society,” with specific reference to service work (2009).

And if these perks were not enough to attract upper-middle-class shoppers who might otherwise avoid discount aisles—in addition to more expected lower income patrons—Target also pursues an extensive and visible campaign of philanthropy. Since 1946, the Dayton Company (and successors Dayton-Hudson and Target Corporation) has given away five percent of its total pre-tax income to charities, local and national (Rowley 2003, 166). In 2005, *Forbes* magazine ranked Target as the number one “most charitable company” as a percentage of its income in the United States (Forbes 2005). Beneficiaries include the Red Cross, the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, United Way, the Salvation Army and Goodwill Industries.

At the end of 2011, Target employed approximately 365,000 people and operated 1,763 stores in the United States, with a significant push into Canada (its first international foray) planned for 2013 (Target 2012a, 19). Though most of its outlets are concentrated in the northern Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois) and high population states such as California, Florida and Texas, the company has outlets in every state except Vermont, (including 66 in New York). In 2012 the company grossed \$68.5 billion from sales and \$1.4 billion from its credit card operations. Total sales were derived from five categories: “household essentials”³⁵ (25 percent), hardlines³⁶ (19 percent), softlines³⁷ (19 percent), food and pet supplies (19 percent), and home furnishings and décor (18 percent). This sharply contrasts with Macy’s, for which 85 percent of sales in that same year came exclusively from apparel, accessories and cosmetics (and none at all from food). Target’s “selling, general and administrative expenses” (“SG&A”, which include labor alongside advertising and promotion costs) were \$14.1 billion, or 20.6 percent of the firm’s gross sales—while at Macy’s SG&A accounted for 31.4 percent—but its cost of merchandise, at

³⁵ Defined as “pharmacy, beauty, personal care, baby wear, cleaning and paper products” (Target 2012a, 27)

³⁶ Defined as “electronics (including video game hardware and software), music, movies, books, computer software, sporting goods and toys” (*ibid*).

³⁷ Defined as “apparel and accessories” (*ibid*).

\$47.9 billion, equaled 70 percent of gross revenue, ten percent *more* than Macy's equivalent portion (59.6 percent). In 2011, Target's post-tax profit and profit rate were \$2.9 billion and 4.2 percent, respectively (Target 2012a, 22), the second of these lower than Macy's for the same year (4.8—see Table 1.1 in chapter 1). If each firm's total sales is divided by its total employees, it can be seen that Target sold almost \$188,000 worth of goods per employee in 2011, while Macy's sold \$154,000, so it is not on *labor* that Macy's appears to be saving, but rather on the cost of goods, which the traditional retailer typically sells at a higher mark-up, creating a higher gross margin (40 percent at Macy's vs. 30 percent at Target).

The Interview Sample

I interviewed workers at three New York City Target stores, selecting in the same convenience fashion as at Macy's, and again with an eye to diversity concerning age, gender, job tenure and department of employment. I conducted 30 interviews with 31 workers (once again, one interview included two participants) lasting an average of 47 minutes each. Thirteen were interviewed from one store, eleven from another, and seven from a third. Upon request, one interviewee provided me with a copy of Target's employee handbook, a seventy-page pamphlet given to all frontline staff during their orientation that outlines company policy and work rules in considerable detail.

Of the 31 interviewees only two had guaranteed full-time hours (both were "specialists"—more about this below) and none were current supervisors, though one had previously been a team leader, the first rung of management at Target. The majority (19) worked in various sales-floor departments at the time of interview, but several had held positions elsewhere, six were cashiers, four worked as stockers and two as food servers at the in-store café.

The range of job tenure was much narrower than among Macy's workers, reflecting the higher turnover rate at Target, with the longest-tenured respondent having been at the company for eleven years, the next-longest for seven, and all others between four years and a few months.³⁸

The Target group was more evenly split between men and women (15 and 16, respectively), but with a larger proportion of black respondents (22, including African-American [9], Afro-Caribbean [12] and West African [1] individuals) than at Macy's. Four respondents were Latino, four were white, and one was Asian. Ethnicity, however, was a more salient category of identity than race among the Target workers interviewed, with twelve having a Caribbean background, which, as discussed below, appeared to impact co-worker dynamics in two of the three stores studied. Finally, the same proportion of Target interviewees (21 out of 31) were born in the United States as those at Macy's, the rest having been born abroad.

The Structure of Work

My analysis of Target's labor processes again starts with its functional base—the intrinsic aspects of work. This descriptive section unfolds in four parts: division of labor, routines and tasks, collectivization, and lastly, control, where I attempt to synthesize the findings of the first three sections while explicating the degree and mechanisms of managerial oversight.

Division of Labor

³⁸ The two stores at which the eleven- and seven-year respondent worked had been in operation, respectively, for eleven and seven years at the time of study; the third store had been operation slightly more than five years. The more recent arrival of Target stores in New York thus partially explains the lack of extended tenures in comparison with Macy's, though even in the 0 to 5-year range, Target respondents were more concentrated in the earlier years than their Macy's counterparts.

Target stores offer a wider array of products than their Macy's counterparts, but fewer varieties of any particular product. Function, rather than brand, is the guiding principle. Stores have four sales departments—hardlines, softlines, pharmacy and food—subdivided into roughly twenty specific areas (e.g. sporting goods, stationary, women's wear, frozen food). Frontline labor is divided not only among these departments, but along the in-store supply chain: from logistics (receiving and stock) to sales floor to “front lanes” (i.e. cashiers, concentrated at one end of the store, unlike at Macy's) and finally, “special services” (customer returns, product questions and shopping carts). Non-supervisory work also takes place in the Food Avenue café area (typically a Pizza Hut and Starbuck's), the Team Member Services Center (TMSC—human resources), and Asset Protection (AP—security). All frontline workers, regardless of department, are called “team members”.

Team members perform the vast majority of work at Target: from maintaining, cleaning and stocking displays, to helping customers, ringing up their purchases and serving them food. TMSC workers also perform reception and clerical duties associated with scheduling and staff breaks and “are basically all female,” according to one four-year team member. The sales floor is by far the largest division and, unlike the others, consists of many sub-divisions. A one-year logistics team member describes this overall structure as follows:

You have the sales floor team members, they basically keep the store brand and organized, keep the shelves stocked and stuff like that; you have the cashiers of course, above them you have the in-stock team members, which is the stuff we pull from upstairs and load onto flats or tubs and push them out, taking it from us. Then they also have different departments like the softlines department, that's all clothes basically, the hardlines departments, you have team members in charge of toys, in charge of kitchen stuff and electronics, all of those departments. They train you so that just in case they are short in one area they could call on you and you could fill that position.

Each sales department and non-sales division is a “team” with its own internal hierarchy. Team members are the lowest and most numerous on this ladder; as the above quote mentions,

they may also be moved from team to team as managers see fit, or volunteer for shifts on alternate teams to gain more hours. As one three-year cashier puts it, “everybody is cross-trained, that way if another department needs help they can take one of the cashiers. I myself can do every single department in the store—I have been cross-trained for just about everything.” Just above team members are specialists, non-supervisory employees who, according to Target’s employee handbook, “use their individual expertise to increase performance in a specific area of the store such as Electronics or Jewelry” (Target 2008, 17). Specialists are potential candidates for the first rung of supervision (the team leader or TL), are guaranteed 40 weekly hours (unlike team members), but earn little more per hour (one woman reported a raise of only \$0.25 upon promotion to a specialist). A first-year team member in a women’s clothing department describes these distinctions as follows:

A: I'm a team member; they're training me to be a team member specialist now, that is like right under the team leader in softlines. A team leader basically tells you everything what to do, so I will be right under the team leader but right above the team members so I am in between as a team member specialist, I am training for that right now.

Q: Do they call it a specialist because you have to learn more about the products?

A: Yeah, and I learn more about the store basically. So that when there is no team lead I am going to be taking over, that is what it is.

Each team has one leader and one or two specialists. “The supervisor is the team leader,” says a one-year stock worker, “and then the boss is the higher rank, the supervisor gives the report to the boss, so the boss doesn’t normally work with us on the floor—it’s the team lead[er] who works with us.” Team leaders assign daily tasks to team members and are responsible for the overall performance of their department. They earn \$3 to \$4 more per hour than team members or specialists but are still hourly employees and perform many maintenance and service tasks as well. The “boss” is then the executive team leader (ETL or “exec”), to whom team leaders report. ETLs, of which there are eight or nine in each store, are “responsible for a specific

area of store operations such as Logistics (stocking), Guest Experience, Hardlines, [or] Softlines,” perform few if any frontline tasks and are the first layer to be paid annual salaries rather than hourly wages (Target 2008, 17). A three-year food service team member describes the difference between TLs and ETLs as follows:

They [team leaders] are actually heads of departments, they are the ones who make daily decisions for the department, and then the ETLs are the ones who like with the paperwork coming from corporate showing them the stats about how we can make things better and delegate to the team. They get good money too, they get better.

A one-year sales-floor worker at a different store sees TLs as “like basically our coworkers. They act as managers, they do their job, but at the same time they are still, you know, nice to us.” On any given shift, one ETL is designated the “leader on duty,” or LOD, for the store: “[t]hey hold the keys, answer questions, open and close the store, etc.” (Target 2008, 62). Above the ETLs is a single “store team leader” (STL) whom workers at one store knew as Mike³⁹:

In terms of how the store management runs, there is an ETL which is an executive team lead, we have a couple of them who are in charge of the whole business that we are in, then there is one guy whose name is [Mike], I forgot his status but he is in charge of everything, he's really cool. He sometimes makes a lot of stupid decisions but he is in charge of everything, then there is the ETLs, then the team leads, then the team members. (1-year stock worker)

Aside from these formal horizontal and vertical divisions, gender is a conspicuous category of job segregation at Target. As at Macy’s, sales-floor workers are often placed in departments geared toward same-sex customers. A first-year team member who works in softlines remarks that in her department, “it’s mostly women, I could count [counts]—there is three dudes out of thirty or forty something [employees].” “I didn’t ask for this section,” she goes on to say, “I wanted to be in electronics, I applied to work there but in my interview they just said they are going to put me in softlines, ‘do you mind?’” A one-year team member at a different store also finds that “softlines is mostly all girls and electronics is mostly guys.”

³⁹ A pseudonym.

Nevertheless, though in some cases segregated by department, sales-floor workers are relatively gender-mixed when compared to logistics and cashiers. “If you go to the check-out lanes,” says a four-year team member, “you will see a majority of girls there. Guys go for backroom, logistics, they don’t really do guest service, guest experience. If you look at guest services in the store it’s mostly all girls.” A one-year stock worker at a different store notes that his team of eight includes six men and two women, also finding that “when you look at it, the ladies are more than the men when it comes to cashiers, and when it comes to my section [in-stock] the male [portion] is higher than the female.” Within my own sample of 31 non-supervisory workers, five out of six cashiers were women and all four logistics workers were men. Starting pay at the time of study for logistics and electronics workers—both male-dominated departments—was a dollar more than for both cashiers (overwhelmingly female) and non-electronics sales-floor workers (higher proportion female).

Against this background of labor division, positions and hierarchies within Target stores, I now examine the routines and tasks of each group in greater detail.

Routines and Tasks

The routine is you come in and if there is re-shop, you put it where it is supposed to be, you take it to the back. Then you get back to your zone and you zone it, that means you push everything forward and make it look neat and clean, that’s basically what we do. And help customers. (1st-year sales-floor team member, electronics)

I mean it’s a simple job, it’s not like you have to think a lot. Sometimes you do when you think about what should I put here if we don’t have this in stock, kind of problem-solving, but you don’t have to go in-depth about what you know. It’s kind of relaxing. (1st-year sales-floor team member, toys, pets and sporting goods)

Selling is beyond the reach of any individual worker at Target. Unlike at Macy’s, where associates are responsible for advising, “inspiring” and ringing up customer purchases, Target team members perform only pieces of this process, with much of the “persuasion” effected by

the store's standardized displays and advertising by the company at large. The flow of goods through the store—and partial back-flow from returned, misplaced or damaged items—is centrally managed by an integrated computer system that connects team members and supervisors through an assortment of handheld and stationary devices. The tasks of frontline workers at Target consist in maintaining various aspects of this just-in-time flow and creating a positive, helpful, yet vigilant environment for customers and would-be shop-lifters. In what follows, I explore the routines and tasks of stock workers, sales-floor workers and cashiers,⁴⁰ examining their degrees of complexity; their interdependency and autonomy (or lack thereof) are considered in the following sections.

“My position is a backroom team member,” says a one-year stock worker in his early 20s.

My daily routines are we have to pull the merchandise that people buy every day and it is a system, a generated system that works through the cashiers. So every hour in the backroom different categories drop of the merchandise people buy so we just have to pull the items and get them out onto the shelves with a sense of urgency.

After the receiving crews, which work overnight and early-morning shifts unloading merchandise from delivery trucks, backroom workers are the next to handle products on their journey through the store. Their title, “backroom,” indicates what another such worker from a different store states directly: “we don't really have interactions with customers. If anything, the team members downstairs [on the sales floor] will call us upstairs if the customer needs something.” Backroom team members are arranged in different teams according to the type of merchandise they handle and essentially perform two tasks: back-stocking and pulling. “[B]ack-stocking is anything that comes into the store, we have to stand in these locations to make sure

⁴⁰ Although I interviewed two food-servers from Target's Food Avenue café, I exclude them from this discussion because they are ancillary to Target stores' operations and also because the degree of standardization and task simplification in these areas conforms for the most part to that found in the areas of work analyzed.

that they are located, to make sure that the stuff is in the system” (1st-year team member).

Pulling, according to this first-year, Caribbean-born stock worker with a bachelor’s degree in psychology, takes place

...on every hour. Every hour a group would, whatever is needed on the sales floor which registers to the PDA which is the [scanning] gun, we would pull it and load them up and send it downstairs according to which floor they go to, so we separate them according to their floor or the department, sometimes it depends on how much the gun is asking for. Sometimes it asks for too much and then some stuff ends up coming back upstairs to back-stock.

Backroom workers organize inventory, scanning each product into the store’s database as they go with a handheld Personal Data Assistant (PDA), then “pull” this onto carts which members of the in-stock crew “push” onto the sales floor. “When it comes up on the computer,” says the first worker quoted, “it shows different names of the batches, like grocery one, grocery two, stuff like that.” In addition, they sort and move some items to a section called “chargeback”: “chargeback is where everything that doesn’t have a barcode or is damaged or has something wrong with—could just be a cut on the side of the box—we charge it out and toss it out” (1st-year backroom worker). “They waste a lot,” he says, “a whole lot. Like thousands of dollars of food and furniture and toys every day.”

Between back-stocking, pulling and sending goods to “chargeback,” backroom workers are responsible for “keeping the backroom area clean” (*ibid*). “Training,” according to the first worker quoted, “was about two weeks. You have to learn how to use the equipment: forklifts, not the one that you drive but the one with the hand, waves, crowns, that’s it.” “Every day is basically the same,” he continues, “team leads handle the paperwork while we pull the items.”

The next workers to handle merchandise are those on the “in-stock” team, who pick up carts of merchandise filled by backroom workers, bring these to sales departments and place

them on shelves. A four-year sales-floor worker and former in-stock team member describes these tasks succinctly:

You come in, you scan items that are out of stock, if it is empty then you scan the shelf label and what that does is—it's a system-generated thing—if it's upstairs [in the backroom] they will send it down; if it's not, the scanner will order it from the headquarters and they will send it in. So it's basically replenishment and we pack it out on the shelves.

Compared to sales-floor departments, “with in-stock the PDA has more different functions, it is the most used piece” of equipment, according to a one-year in-stock team member who previously worked on the sales floor. The device is used

to search out, to research how to pull [items from backroom]. I can't just take some merchandise off of the shelves, I have to keep a record of all this on the scanner and it takes me time, it took me some time before I was able to familiarize myself with the functions of the PDA.

Unlike backroom workers, in-stock employees do have contact with customers and are expected to help them when they approach with questions. “Guests come up to me and say ‘oh I need this, I need to buy that,’” says the same in-stock worker. But to him, “it is not as often as when I was on the sales floor.”

Sales-floor workers perform three basic functions: “zoning,” “re-shop” and customer service. Zoning, as Target defines it, is “[s]traightening and cleaning each department during and especially at the end of each day so that each item is in its proper place” (Target 2008, 64). “Proper place” for each department’s products is stipulated in a planogram—a “picture or layout plan describing exactly where merchandise is to be displayed on the gondola or other fixture” (*ibid*). “Re-shop,” states a two-year sales-floor worker, “is when you take the items and put them back on the shelf or, if it is damaged, just taking care of the product, moving it from the floor to the backroom.” It includes replacing items on shelves that have been returned by guests or misplaced throughout the store, including the fitting rooms. The following description from a

first-year team member and college student illustrates the rhythm of re-shop and zoning tasks in a “softlines” department:

Re-shop is like if you are in the fitting room, everything that people try on and don't want? We take it and put it on a T-rack. By the end of the night all of it has to be done, all of the clothes that the people tried on during the day have to be back on the floor, so we are in charge of zoning. Zoning is making everything small, medium, large, proper areas, if a shirt is over there you have to put it back over here. So we do zoning, re-shop and pickups. Pickups is multitasking—we make sure there is nothing on the floor, no re-shop in the fitting room. If there is re-shop in the fitting room it is a problem because they're going to run after us like, Do your re-shop! Do your re-shop! Hurry up, we have to leave by eleven o'clock! I know tonight it's going to be crazy, because you can already see all our team members walking in and out, in and out. I am scared to go to work right now—I think I'm probably going to be eaten by a clothes monster!

Part of zoning and re-shop is also communicating with logistics team members about needed inventory. For this sales-floor workers use the PDA to interface with the store's internal database: “The PDA is like the biggest thing because we use it so much,” says a one-year softlines specialist, “basically it is the whole store in one little machine. “For me,” she continues, “I need it like every day, all the time; for a regular salesperson they wouldn't need it that much, they might not need it at all.”

Customer service intersects with sales-floor workers' zoning and re-shop tasks. They continually perform one or the other as assigned by the team leader, but are simultaneously expected to be available to customers. “We zone, zone, zone,” says a four-year team member, currently a cashier but speaking of her time on the sales floor, “and they want us to be nice and gracious to everybody who comes in.” Target's customer service motto is “Fast, Fun and Friendly” and its signature sales question, “Can I help you find something?” Sales-floor and in-stock workers are “coached” to ask this of all customers (referred to as “guests”) that come within ten feet and to interrupt whatever tasks they are doing to prioritize customer needs. A one-year part-time sales-floor worker and middle school teacher describes her experience as follows:

Being readily available to guests at any time they need something—that is going to make sales. A couple of days ago I was working in pets and seasonal but on my way to somewhere else I got stopped by three different guests and had to call backroom for three different items. That helps with sales, helps drive sales, and if I say just hey, go ask somebody that works in that section, that is not going to help sales because they are probably not going to do that so you have got to be on top of your game all the time. Our motto is fast, fun and friendly. And just be there.

And a first-year sales-floor worker corroborates this:

If they need help I would stop what I'm doing and start helping the customer because I always think they come first. One thing they say is 'how much is this?' The tag is right there! I will be like, \$19.99, and they're like, 'oh duh!' They are funny, I love the guests. Sometimes, not all the time.

But customer interaction is not always so fast, fun and friendly for sales-floor workers. A one-year team member and recent West African immigrant describes his difficulties:

Sometimes I tell the guests 'go to this aisle' and then they come back and say 'I can't find it,' so sometimes I have to go and look for it myself, and I ask the guest, 'what is the item?' And the guests will be like 'oh, wait a minute, I'm sorry,' because sometimes they have personal problems and they bring that into the store and get some sort of confusion. Others have a language barrier, they speak Spanish, I don't speak Spanish, so it becomes difficult. If there is no team member around to help me I become an ashtray, let me put it that way.

And a one-year softlines specialist finds use of the phrase 'can I help you find something?' "so annoying"

Because they literally have us, every five minutes asking every single customer 'can I help you find something?' Mind you, that customer has probably been asked 'can I help you find something?' like twenty times that day, so it's annoying to the customer and also annoying to us because we can't get done what we have to get done. It is like always pleasing the customer but they take it to the extreme, like on our knees, 'can I help you find something?' It's really annoying, I don't like it.

Annoying or not, Target's trademark question embodies the type of service expected of sales-floor workers. In contrast to Macy's, where associates must often utilize significant product knowledge to meet sales goals, particularly for higher-priced or luxury goods, Target's sales-floor team members are required to have more general inventory rather than product-specific knowledge, and even this inventory knowledge can be readily supplemented by use of the PDA

and walkie-talkies for in-store communication. “Training took me two weeks,” says a first-year sales-floor worker in her early twenties,

but after the first week I was already pretty much familiar with everything, because they are always willing to help you out. It's not like there is too much pressure, you gotta know this, you gotta know that, there is a lot of information that you take in, but to get familiar with the place, to know where things is at, to know who to talk to, I figured it out. I knew everything within a week, after my two weeks’ training I was set, I didn't have to ask anyone anything.

Another first-year sales-floor worker from the same store also found his job training short and non-product-specific:

When I was trained they had one trainer but she doesn't even know how to use the equipment so she did not train me on the equipment. She just trained me on the basics of what I normally do, and then I just picked up on how to use the PDA and the walkie and all that other stuff from other people. I remember I was pretty lost when I was training.

Only in the electronics and frozen food departments are team members expected to have a modicum of product knowledge. “Electronics,” says a two-year sales-floor worker in that department, comparing it to toys and domestics where he used to work, “is basically the same thing, but they urge us to push more guest experience and stuff like that because in electronics we get scored on attachments” (accessories such as speakers and HDMI cables for larger items like televisions or laptops). A three-year specialist and former team leader confirms this:

Q: Do they give you any training in terms of product knowledge?

A: Only electronics does that openly, if something new is coming out and there’s going to be a big sale they will teach you what you need to know about selling it and asset protection regarding it. But to answer your question, they train you on food, they do a lot of training, so that you know kill zones [appropriate temperatures] for different sections of meat like chicken and beef.

Q: So most of what sales staff do is not actually selling?

A: Yeah, it is not a sales-based thing because we don't get commission. I think if they did give commission, people would be more enthusiastic in terms of guest experience, but since there is no commission-based sales, people don't really care about their service.

And another four-year sales-floor team member from the stationary department states that “mostly in electronics they have to be knowledgeable, you have to have some kind of background. But not for me, no; no knowledge is necessary.”

The last workers to handle products (and customers) on their path through the store are the cashiers. Work in this section is arguably the most routinized and repetitive at Target. “It’s nothing too complicated,” says a first-year cashier and college student, “it’s basically the same thing over and over again.” “It’s not that difficult of a job,” says another, a recent South American immigrant, “it was pretty easy for me to start. Because you work at the register and it practically runs itself—you just have to read the stream.” A two-year Target worker contrasts her current experience as a cashier to her former position at the in-store Starbucks:

Yeah, I hate it. Because you just sit there all day and you just beep, beep, beep. It's supposed to move fast but some people, when they look at the total are like, ‘oh wow, can you take that back?’ So you have to stop and scroll and look at what they have, and some of the stuff doesn't have a name on it so you don't know exactly what it is. Then I have to call a team lead and wait for them to come over. You can't do anything, there are only three or four of them walking around and like 26 lanes so you have your light on and you can't do anything until they come, so sometimes it gets frustrating.

Another cashier and former sales-floor worker with four years at the company describes her current position in simple terms:

Basically you are supposed to stand up at the register and when the guest comes you ring them up, you smile, you greet them, “hi, how are you today? Did you find everything you're looking for?” You bag the groceries and tell them to have a nice day. That’s basically what you do as a cashier.

When I ask a first-year male cashier, the only one interviewed, how long it took him to learn the tasks for his position, he replies, “oh that was easy, I learned everything in about two days.”

Much like backroom and in-stock workers whose activities follow the prescriptions of the computerized inventory system communicated through the PDA, cashiers’ work largely follows the dictates of the register. After cashiers scan product barcodes, the register tallies the bill, adds

tax, communicates inventory changes to the overall system (linked to stock workers' PDAs), indicates whether a customer ID check or other verification is necessary, tallies and indicates change for cash transactions and promotional offers for credit card users.

Customer interaction, however, provides a source of unpredictability and potential abuse. "We are here to help them," says the same male cashier, a recent immigrant from South Asia, "but sometimes there are some guests that are really crazy, that is one thing I hate about [being a] cashier." The first-year cashier from South America finds that

Customers? Oh my god, that is the hardest part about the work. It's not the employees or the employer or something like that, but the customers. There was this [one] customer and he wanted all the stuff he was buying to be checked in a certain way and positioned very particularly in a certain box. He told me, 'I want this in here and that in there' and I said 'okay, Sir, just let me scan everything.' So I start to scan everything and he was just putting one thing in at a time. And I said 'I need everything, Sir, I need you to upload everything and have all the stuff on the conveyor belt. We need to have all of the stuff in there first to do things quickly.' So he wouldn't do that, he just kept picking up one thing at a time, and that will kill my score because I have to do everything fast.

The speed at which cashiers complete each transaction—from the first item scanned to final payment—is timed and recorded for each individual worker by the register. Consistently low speeds can translate into poor performance reviews by team leaders, which can have a negative impact on pay increases, weekly hours and ultimately, job retention.

Collectivization

We call it one team, one dream. Each department is one team, like softlines, electronics, health and beauty, but if health and beauty is not done and we are, then we go to help them, so everybody is just one team, altogether. We help each other out all the time; everybody has to help each other out. (1st-year sales-floor worker, softlines)

At Macy's maintenance work is relatively collectivized among associates, specialists and support staff within each sales department. Cooperation across departments is almost non-existent, however, and customer service tasks are individually incentivized, creating a latent

culture of competition. At Target, these barriers to cooperation are non-existent: not only do team members work together daily to complete departmental re-shop, zoning and stocking tasks, they are also regularly shifted to other departments to help them achieve these ends when there is a staff shortage or high customer volume. Sales work, as discussed in the previous section, is also beyond the reach of any individual worker, with goal attainment tallied for the store as a whole rather than for individuals or even specific departments. Target's customer service tasks, in contrast to those at Macy's, are thus also collectivized. A common refrain from those interviewed, reflecting a corporate motto, was that each store is "one team, one dream".

Within each department, most work is performed collectively. "Working together?" replies a one-year softlines specialist to my question, "a good 90 percent of the time. The only time I would be by myself is if I'm the only one in the store, say from eight until nine, but mostly working together." A one-year in-stock worker from another store finds that "everything works well—there is no single day that we move apart, we are always together." And a first-year sales floor worker in the market section of a different store describes the necessity of cooperation for completing re-shop and zoning tasks:

Say me and another one of the workers are in the dry market area and there are two sides so at the end of the night we know that side is yours, this side is mine, and if there is any re-shop it is for the whole section so we will put our carts together and get all the re-shop out together. At night there is something we call wave zoning where we zone together, like you take this side, I take that side, and we just zone each aisle together. So yeah, we do work together a lot.

Although tasks are often delegated by team leaders to individual team members, completion of zoning and re-shop (for sales areas) or backstocking, pulling and pushing (for backroom and in-stock) is ultimately a team responsibility to which faster workers may be re-assigned when slower workers are unable to finish, or which later shifts may be required to complete. "Some days the workload is heavy," says a four-year sales-floor team member, "and if the manager

doesn't know that you need help, you will be stuck and the manager will hold you accountable for that work that is not done. So you have to cooperate." A first-year softlines team member finds that

The people who work in the morning—we definitely depend on them because at night we depend on each other. The closing team, if we leave re-shop, the morning team has to do it, and if the morning team never does the re-shop then we have to do that morning's re-shop, and then the afternoon [shift] leaves the re-shop for the evening and then for closing. So we definitely depend on each other a lot.

Even cashiers—whose tasks are among the most individualized at Target—cooperate at times to overcome short-term snags in the flow of check-outs: "Whenever I need help and I go to any other girl or boy who is next to me they do help," states a first-year cashier. "Even though I'm new, there is another person who is even newer, and they are asking me and I help them also."

Taken together, intra-departmental cooperation represents no significant departure from the organization of non-selling work at Macy's. What distinguishes Target from its more traditional competitor is the extensive amount of cooperation *across* departments, from maintenance and stocking duties to customer service and sales itself. "Sometimes when in-stock need help," says a first-year backroom worker,

we will take stuff from them and bring it upstairs. I take stuff downstairs myself sometimes from the freezer. Sometimes when my team comes in, people come upstairs from the sales floor and ask, ok, what do we got? What we need to push? And I will communicate with them and sometimes they won't have to come upstairs, I will go downstairs.

There is thus little permanent separation between backroom, in-stock and some sales-floor workers, who trade roles when necessary to accomplish certain tasks. A one-year backroom worker comments that "if it's very busy then the manager may ask a team member from the sales floor to help us out and they give us a hand." And the following exchange with a first-year sales-floor worker supports this:

Q: Is there a lot of separation between stock people and people on the floor?

A: No we interact with each other because sometimes we have to go back upstairs to let them know or sometimes there is an item where there is none on the shelves so we check the system [PDA] and if we have it we can call upstairs and meet each other and the guest gets the item.

Cross-departmental cooperation also occurs at the other end of the in-store supply chain, between sales floor and front lane workers. “They always train you on the sales floor and on the cash register,” says a first-year market team member, “because it gets really busy in the store and they sometimes call for back-up, so everyone knows how to work the register.” A first-year electronics team member confirms this:

When the check lane is very busy they call for back up. If you're upstairs they might ask you to come down and help with the guest assistance, so you come down and ring a few guests for a few minutes, help get the lines shorter and then you go back to work. So that is why everyone is trained as a cashier here.

Cross-training extends not only to “everyone [being] trained to work as a cashier” (1st-year sales floor worker, market) but also to different sales departments. “In my store we all got to know each other and we do everything,” says a first-year sales-floor worker and teacher. “I will come on a shift,” she continues, “‘you’re upstairs tonight’; I’ll come on a shift, ‘you’re downstairs tonight’. OK, that’s what I do, that’s how it is.” “So everybody is kind of cross-trained?” I ask a different first-year sales-floor worker from the market section. “Yeah,” she answers,

I am in the market department but I am also cross-trained in chemicals where they sell cleaning supplies, I can get cross-trained in electronics, the clothes department. The whole thing is “fast, fun and friendly”—everyone is always on the walkie [talkie], helping each other out.

Integrated communication technology, such as the register-to-PDA inventory system and walkie-talkies, plays a key role in enabling store-wide cooperation. “We use the walk-talkies to communicate in the store,” says a three-year sales-floor worker,

The only people who have their own separate walkies is the Asset Protection [division], they got a whole other channel and no one [else] hears it. But everyone else in the store

from the store manager down to the newest team member can all speak to each other on the walkie.

Control

I pretty much did anything I wanted in Macy's, they didn't have strict guidelines. The only thing they were strict about was trying to get everybody to sign up for the Macy's card. Target is a little more strict, I guess since they are used to dealing with kids [i.e. younger workers], so they are on you making sure you're on time, on you for doing your work and stuff, so it's different. (1st-year Target sales floor worker, former Macy's associate)

At Macy's frontline sales workers enjoy a degree of autonomy over their immediate task inputs, but their sales output is tightly monitored and (dis-)incentivized for each individual. I described this form of work organization, combined as it was with an expanding number of non-selling tasks required of sales staff, as *inverted Taylorism*, or what on Edwards' (1979) three-part typology might be seen as an incipient form of "technical control" emerging from a predominantly "simple" or "hierarchical" system. At Target, while sales output is also closely monitored, this is done for the *store as a whole*, since the process of selling has itself been collectivized and is not reducible to the talent of an individual worker. In some respects, the organization of work at Target corresponds to Aglietta's description of Fordism, or what Edwards would term fully-fledged technical control: "the integration of different segments of the labour process by a system of conveyors and handling devices [and] the fixing of workers to jobs whose positions were rigorously determined by the configuration of the machine system" (Aglietta 1979, 118).

But there is one key exception: Target workers are not 'fixed' to their jobs in any 'rigorous' fashion. As noted in the previous section, they rotate frequently among a set of clearly defined positions with standardized tasks. Furthermore, workers are organized in "teams" that hold daily "huddles" (discussed below) to allow for worker input and quasi-participative

management. These innovations, when applied to an already standardized and collectivized labor process, fit closely with what more recent analysts refer to as “lean production” (Moody 1997; Womack and Jones 2003), the “Japanese model” (Milkman 1991; Graham 1995), or “Toyotism” (Dohse, Jürgens and Malsch 1985). For these reasons, the organization of work at Target can be understood as *service Toyotism*.

What does this tell us about control? Specifically, how do top-level Target managers make sure that frontline employees are following the company’s meticulously prescribed methods for stocking, zoning, ringing up and advising customers, and with what degree of success? First, I argue that the minute subdivision of store-level tasks and their horizontal coordination through inventory and communication technology are evidence of technical control—i.e. reducing the bandwidth of workers’ task-based decision-making through pre-planning and routinization. Second, such tight prescription of rules and methods and their diffusion down the company hierarchy constitute a form of “bureaucratic control,” the third and highest stage in Edwards’ typology. But third, due to the inherent unpredictability experienced by “customer-oriented bureaucracies” (Korczynski 2002, 2009) in industries like retail, a non-trivial degree of power is left to first-level supervisors, which invokes what Edwards calls “simple” control (persuasion and command) alongside more sophisticated technical and bureaucratic means. Together, all this adds up to a generally lower level of autonomy for Target workers than for those at Macy’s. When combined with key aspects of the employment relationship, I argue in the next chapter that this package of strategies constitutes a fourth system of control beyond Edwards’ three-part schema—one that is specific to large, bureaucratic service organizations.

When I ask a three-year sales-floor team member whether there are any specific rules for zoning, he replies, “yes, you have to make sure that every item is in the right location and sometimes it’s two faces, sometimes it’s forward-facing, sometimes there are four items, one, two, three and they should be forward facing.” The design of stock displays, and sales-floor workers’ attendant tasks of zoning and re-shop, are meticulously specified in “planograms” for each department. Another three-year employee and former team leader describes the use of these during his time as a supervisor:

It's like a package that tells you everything, a blueprint that gives you all the information you need to know. I would hand it out to my team members and basically my role as a team leader was just giving them the planograms and managing—like if one finished early I could have them help the next one and just get the whole job done throughout the night—that was basically it. And I had to walk around and identify any problems, anything that could be fixed, stuff like that.

Meticulous task specification, as evidenced in the use of planograms, minimizes the role for team members’ decision-making. As one four-year sales-floor worker puts it,

You know what you have to do, you know what departments need and you just go to them, get whatever stuff you need from the back to the floor and when that's done you just start keeping the shelves neat for the next day. So that's pretty much the job right now, pretty routine. Nobody has to tell me, I already know.

“You only make decisions for yourself,” states a first-year sales floor worker, “if there is something—it’s called ‘flexing it’—where you just put it out because there is no more space; it’s mainly sale items at the front.”

Standardization also extends to customer service: the use of ‘Can I help you find something?’ as the question for all customers, combined with the ‘Fast, Fun and Friendly’ approach. A three-page section of Target’s handbook is dedicated to the appropriate use of this question, including an instructive FAQ with the following lead question:

Q: Do I have to specifically ask “Can I help you find something?” or can I use my own words?

A: Think of “Can I help you find something?” as our service trademark. If guests hear team members consistently ask the same question, over time they will associate the exact phrase with Target, making it part of our brand. (Target 2008, 13)

Further Q-and-As stipulate when it is appropriate and when not to ask ‘Can I help you find something?’ the latter including “if a guest is distracted,” when he or she “may be busy with kids, having a fun time with friends or on the phone” (*ibid*). ‘Fast, Fun and Friendly’ is defined a few pages earlier as “the ‘personality’ of the Target brand. It’s more than being nice to each other and to guests...It’s how we bring the brand to life for our guests and fellow team members” (*ibid*, 8).

With respect to sales floor workers, the only means of monitoring their compliance with these standards is through observation by team leaders and occasionally ETLs. “They have supervisors that watch you,” says the same four-year sales floor worker quoted earlier, “you don’t know they watch you but they watch you.” A first-year sales floor worker states that “the team leads and the LODs constantly walk the floor to see if we are on task and that we are not loafing,” and another first-year team member from the same store echoes the opinion of many others in “believ[ing] that they do use the [in-store] cameras to watch how everybody is working. I mean they would always come out and say, ‘hey, I see you on the camera doing this or doing that.’”

But for backroom, in-stock and front-lanes workers, output and compliance are measured quantitatively. “If you use the scanner,” says a four-year former in-stock worker, “it tells them exactly what you do because you have to put your name and numbers in to start the scanner.”

Another one-year in-stock worker describes the use of a “scorecard” for each team member

based on how fast you scan, how you fix re-checks and then if you are able to come out a clean shift, if you fix [all] the re-checks, you are 100 percent. If you get ten re-checks and you fix five, where are the rest of the five? That means you are going down. So every

month they give us our score based on our scanning, how fast we scan and how we fix the re-checks, individually, every individual.

The speed and accuracy with which backroom workers “pull” merchandise is similarly recorded:

The cab [computer screen order] drops every hour on the hour and we have to pull all that merchandise in one hour, or as close as possible. If we go over then it turns up on the paperwork as red, which means we haven’t pulled those items within the hour. The manager can check through your numbers, see how much stuff you pulled, it will tell them your accuracy and stuff like that. (1-year backroom team member)

And also for cashiers:

There is a score, how fast I take care of the guest. If I take a longer time I get an R [red], which means bad, or a G [green], which means good. If I get an R my score goes down a point so every day when I come I put my number in the main system and at the end they can see who did more service or better service or faster service for the guest. For us we always have to do it at 90 [percent G] or above, and we also have to ask if they want a Target card or to take a survey and the more surveys or red cards you give out the more points you get. (1st-year cashier)

In addition to these measures of individual output, sales output is measured for the store as a whole and ranked against a daily goal, which, as at Macy’s, is calculated by corporate-level management using that store’s previous year-to-date sales plus an incremental increase. “Do they ever break it down by department?” I ask a first-year sales-floor worker. “No” she tells me,

The pharmacy is separate and they add that in later, and then Food Avenue, but the sales goals are for the whole store and then the other stuff gets added in and that equals our total sales. If we are consistently not making sales goals, then they are going to be short on giving people hours and pay because if we aren’t making their goals they can’t pay. So they usually talk about that, like we need to get our sales goals up and then we can get our hours up.⁴¹

Taken together, the minute subdivision and pre-specification of customer service and maintenance tasks, combined with multiple electronic measures of individual and store-level output, constitute a system of technical control that is more robust and sophisticated than the one in use at Macy’s, which attempts to pre-program customer service (“MAGIC”) to minimal effect

⁴¹ Discussions such as these between workers and managers most often take place at twice-daily “huddles” which are detailed below and in the following section.

and measures individual, departmental and store-wide sales output. But the extent of pre-specification, of complex rules and methods for store-level operations at Target goes beyond the technical organization of work. It bridges into “the social and organizational structure of the firm” and “establishes the impersonal force of ‘company rules’ or ‘company policy’ as the basis of control” (Edwards 1979, 131). This is bureaucratic control.

Bureaucratic control is evidenced by three sets of workplace norms at Target: rules about “compliance” and being “brand”, employee performance reviews and regular department- and store-level grading carried out by district- and corporate-level supervisors. “Compliance” is a management-promulgated cluster concept encompassing employee dress code, attendance, meal and rest breaks, and inter-personal behavior. When workers are in compliance, they are said to be “brand,” which can also refer to the condition of the store—whether displays and cleanliness conform to planograms and corporate guidelines. “The rules,” says a three-year in-stock worker, who also worked in the backroom and on the sales floor,

are that you have to go on your break at a certain time to stay in *compliance*, meaning that you don't get a write up from the managers. For example, I have to clock out on my break at 11:55 in order to remain in compliance. Once you are out of compliance you have to sign a document stating you were out of compliance, and if you get three out of compliances or sometimes even two, you get a write-up, and that affects your review. If you have three write-ups you can get fired. Sometimes it all depends on your team lead, if your team lead speaks to you too many times, you can get fired just like that. (emphasis added)

“Hitting compliance,” as a first-year sales floor worker puts it, in most cases means violation or near-violation of company shift-time and rest-break guidelines, which are fine-tuned to match federal and state wage and hour laws. It can also refer to dress code: “a red top (any shade of red is fine, but not orange, pink or purple) and solid color pants or skirts (preferably khaki)” followed by eleven types of clothing under the heading “Don’t wear” (Target 2008, 21).

Attendance: “If you are absent three scheduled days in a row without calling your team

leader...you will be considered to have voluntarily terminated your employment with Target” (*ibid*). And finally, compliance refers to a series of rules stipulated as the company’s “Drug-Free-,” “Violence-Free-” and “Harassment-Free Workplace” policies (*ibid*, 46-51). Violation of any of these rules can result in a write-up or immediate dismissal, depending on the severity of the infraction or in some cases, the disposition of the supervisor.

Write-ups also play a role in each employee’s annual review, alongside quantitative and qualitative performance scores. Reviews take place 90 days after each employee’s start at Target—the probation period—and then once per year in May for everyone in the store. A first-year sales floor worker describes her experience with the review process:

My first review I got a satisfactory, it was okay. They told me I needed to interact more with the team members and team leaders, but actually my manager told me about a week ago that she has been watching my progress and she likes how I am developing. She said ‘you are still kind of to yourself, which is not bad but you are interacting more with the team members and team leads which is good’ and she likes it. At my review they said I got better with my lateness. The review, depending on how well you do they give you, well everybody gets a raise; I think the least you can get is \$0.10, which is what I got, a \$0.10 raise. It wasn't that bad—basically all she said was she wanted me to interact more.

As this young woman describes, the review process consists of team leaders sitting down with individual team members and discussing their “performance and attendance—those are the two most important things” (3-year in-stock team member), which determine the size of one’s raise, chances for promotion, and contain the possibility for dismissal. Dismissal, however, can occur outside the framework of reviews given three write-ups, consecutive absences or a serious violation of “compliance,” such as fighting in the store. Promotions also occur throughout the year “as positions become available”: notices are posted, team members apply and “must be supported by [their] supervisor and have worked at Target for at least 90 days to be eligible” (Target 2008, 29).

Annual reviews and consideration for promotion, however, also depend on a more ‘Toyotistic’ component of control: recognition. At daily huddles team leaders inform team members about various tasks and motivate them with “recognition”: “They will give me recognition if I did something good, they will recognize it at the huddle,” says a one-year sales-floor worker. Team members are also encouraged to “recognize” each other at huddles and with “Great Team” cards that they can turn in more discretely to team leaders and ETLs:

At Target, we appreciate quality work and quality team members. That’s why we have a Great Team Recognition program. Just spot a Great team attitude, a Great idea or a Great act of service and show appreciation with Great Team cards. Giving recognition is easy – and it feels great! (Target 2008, 19)

Such positive recognition⁴² from other team members, or its absence, is thus factored into each employee’s annual review, though with exactly what weight is unclear.

The final aspect of bureaucratic control at Target consists of department and store-level grading carried out by higher-level management and customers. On the one hand, this takes place through customer surveys handed out by cashiers as customers leave the store. These are completed online and tallied up to produce a red, yellow or green customer service rating for each store—green being the best, yellow in the middle and red the worst (counter-intuitively given the company’s ubiquitous red logo). Store-level ratings based on customer surveys reflect back on frontline workers, though not as individuals, and are discussed with them by ETLs and team leaders:

We get red, yellow, green on surveys. We get graded on our performance, how quickly by managers and through the surveys because if the guests are happy they are showing that we are working quickly and efficiently and everything is up to par. (2-year cashier and food server)

⁴² All interviewees described coworker recognition at huddles and through Great Team cards as solely positive, and indeed, this is in line with the corporation’s design of the program, stated above.

Store-level grading is also carried out by regional and corporate managers. A first-year backroom worker knows one such regional supervisor simply as “Mario”: “when [Mario] comes my exec [ETL] turns into a scaredy-cat.” He further explains the process and impact of such reviews:

They come in to check the store and make sure that everything is running perfectly fine. We just have to make sure the store is brand: the bathroom is clean, the sales floor is stocked and packed with team members who are looking brand, you can't walk around there looking messy, everything is clean, you have to make sure that everything is on point when we have that big visit. When the store is *green* everything is fine, back-stock is 100 percent, pulling is 100 percent, pushing stuff on the floor is 100 percent, people calling on the walkies for items is 100 percent, everything is 100 percent in the store when we are green. When we are *yellow* it could mean that backroom is 100 percent and sales floor is 100 percent but the entertainment section is not and that one part affects the whole store so that's why we are yellow. It basically means we have a little bit of problems but nothing that cannot be fixed. But when we are *red*? You don't even want to know. Everyone turns into an absolute bitch, nobody can stand anyone, there is a bunch of yelling and attitudes, it is not good when the store is red, at all. (emphasis added)

The systematic use of both customer reviews and corporate-level inspections, combined with a standardized grading scheme, the diffusion of familiarity with this scheme and its results all the way down to frontline workers provide strong evidence of bureaucratic control at Target.

But formal rules and procedures do not govern all aspects of supervision and decision-making. In particular, the annual review process, carried out as it is by first-level supervisors (team leaders) contains ample room for subjective judgment. “There is a lot of favoritism here, a lot of favoritism,” says a three-year cashier, “the last annual we got I didn't get a raise, they told me my work was unsatisfactory.” A two-year cashier and food server from the same store also believes

That is how you get promoted in there. If they don't like you, you are stuck. If they like you, it doesn't matter if you bust your ass or not, you could be the meanest person in the world, coming to work, being mean all day and bust your ass and get every task they ask of you done but today, tomorrow it doesn't matter because you are not liked. It doesn't matter what you do, they grade you on whether they like you or not, not what your performance is.

A four-year team member, currently a cashier but who previously worked on the sales floor of a different Target store remarks

You have a lot of favoritism, because if I'm in with a supervisor I can walk around and do certain things, if I'm not I can't walk around and do certain things. And in the end they will recommend you [for promotion] instead of somebody that really deserves it. I guess it's the luck of the draw, that's how I know supervisors working here and especially in this store here, it works like that, there is a lot of favoritism.

And a three-year specialist and former team leader discusses some TLs' strategy of "managing out" particular team members:

A: Honestly at Target it's a lot about who you know and who likes you. There are certain people that if you are in good with them you are good, but if you are bad with them you will be managed out.

Q: Managed out—does that mean they make it bad so that you want to leave?

A: Yeah. They will try to manage you out, like if you are one-day unavailable, this guy, his availability was that he could work any day of the week except Saturday because he goes to church. The manager is the type who likes to shake things up, likes to keep people off balance, so he will give him no other days except Saturday to work, so he has to call out every week. And what happens if he does that? He will get fired. So they put you in like a check-mate situation sometimes if it is a bad connection.

The existence of such subjective bases for promotion or demotion of frontline employees provides evidence for the persistence of simple control alongside technical and bureaucratic mechanisms at Target.

The sum of these control mechanisms—their integration and reach—is a generally lower level of autonomy for Target's frontline workers than for those at Macy's. Combined with a more minute division of labor, greater standardization of tasks and their increased collectivization, the structure of work at Target is thus accurately captured by the continuous flow, standardization and teamwork principles of lean production or "Toyotism". But "The Toyota Way" and most versions of lean production cover more than just the intrinsic aspects of work: they bridge into the extrinsic, or what I next discuss as the employment relationship,

through the self-proclaimed principle of “respect for people” (Liker 2004) or in some cases, “participative management” (Smith 2001).

The Employment Relationship

In this section I explore the extrinsic aspects of work at Target: pay, benefits and job security, followed by working conditions (narrowly defined), managerial style and finally, the company’s myriad strategies for union avoidance. Pay, benefits and working conditions are largely equivalent to those at Macy’s but job security is less, the managerial style more unified and systematically ‘cooperative,’ and Target is far from neutral on the question of unions. These extrinsic characteristics are largely congruent with the intrinsic dynamics uncovered in the previous section when taken against the backdrop of critical literature on the latent purpose of “lean” work systems which includes union avoidance.

Pay, Benefits and Job Security

Working at Target, much like at Macy’s, is a low-wage endeavor in the majority of cases. But for entry-level workers, not *as* low: the starting wage for most frontline workers at the three stores I investigated was \$9.50; at the two Macy’s stores, \$7.50. On the face of it, this two-dollar, or 27 percent difference is surprising, given that the Macy’s stores are unionized and Target’s are not. When confronted with this fact, Macy’s union president Ken Bordieri stated that his union had bargained for higher starting wages in each of the last two contract rounds but “couldn’t get it”. Macy’s wages, however, exhibit a wider range and are likely higher on average than Target’s, consisting as they do of both commissioned and straight-hourly forms, combined with a larger number of longer-tenured workers with accumulated pay raises. The highest hourly rate found at Macy’s was \$22.75 for a 31-year sales associate; at Target it was \$11.10 for a two-year

team member in the electronics department, and two other respondents believed there to be hourly pay caps of \$12.35 for softlines workers and \$15 for all team members, respectively.

As among Macy's workers, it is worth considering the impact of such wages on Target workers' ability to sustain themselves outside of work, which, as previously found, is often contingent on individuals' family situations. A first-year, part-time sales-floor worker who is also a teacher had this to say about supporting herself solely from a Target income:

There is no way. I have a mortgage, I have a brand new car, there is just no way I would make it at all. If I can't make it on my teaching paycheck there is no way I would be able to make it on a Target paycheck. The only way I would be able to would be if I was making \$45,000 a year, then I would. But yeah, there is no way.

A one-year sales-floor worker who makes \$9.50 an hour remarks similarly that "this is hand to mouth, you know what I mean? This is just keeping what I need to survive, this can't buy me a house." And a four-year, full-time team member, currently a cashier who had previously worked at a Target in Texas, compares her expenses between there and New York:

Down there I had my own apartment, everything I could possibly want in the apartment, and I still had money left over to buy food and everything. Here? I have to live with my cousin because I cannot afford my own apartment while working here. I lived by myself for three-and-a-half years and I come here and I have to stay with someone.

"I guess it is good for a teenager," says a first-year sales-floor worker who earns \$9.60 an hour.

When I mention her previous statements that she is in fact 24 and has a bachelor's degree, she responds

No, so it's not really doing anything for me. And we get paid bi-weekly so that's kind of hard too because I'm used to getting paid every week. But I feel that I should be in the double digits by now. I don't have kids or anything like that so what I am making now is good for me, for my personal life. If I had a child, then this \$9.60 would not be cutting it.

A first-year team member who had previously worked at one of the Macy's stores studied, was aware of the pay difference between the two companies: "Target does pay more, yeah. The only difference is that this is every two, Macy's is every week. But Target does pay more."

On the benefit field, things at first seem rather different. “We have a health insurance, we have dental and all that,” says an eleven-year sales floor worker, the longest tenured in my sample. “Yes they do,” replies a first-year sales-floor worker to the same question; “they give health, dental, 401(k) plan, holidays, sick days, vacation days, just ask in advance and they will give it to you.” “Do you get health benefits from Target?” I ask the part-time team member and school teacher quoted earlier. “You can,” she replies, “if you are consistently working the whole year twenty hours or more a week.” But appearances can be deceiving. The eleven-year sales-floor worker isn’t on Target’s healthcare plan: “I have Medicaid,” she tells me. The first-year sales-floor worker “didn’t actually do [apply for] it yet,” and the part-time team member and teacher “get[s] health insurance through my school, so I don’t need it [from Target].” In fact, of the 31 Target workers interviewed, only one was currently enrolled in the company’s healthcare or dental plans and none were on the 401(k) plan. “It’s too expensive,” says a seven-year, full-time sales-floor worker and single mother of two, “since my pay is not big I get Medicaid and food stamps, and I get child support for my son.”⁴³ Paid vacation and sick days, for their part, are determined by the number of hours worked per year. According to the same seven-year sales-floor worker, “the only way that you could earn like two weeks [vacation] is by never missing one day or calling out because then it doesn’t amount to much.”

And it is often difficult to accumulate many hours or avoid calling out because weekly schedules and hours constantly change. Of the 31 workers interviewed, only the two specialists claimed to have consistent 40-hour weeks; the other 29 had fluctuating schedules. “Team leads have full-time,” says the part-time team member and teacher, “but anybody below the team leads, like me, no they don’t.” A one-year backroom worker described his situation during the

⁴³ Dube and Jacobs (2004) uncovered systematic ‘outsourcing’ by Walmart of employee benefits onto public assistance programs in California, a strategy which evidence from New York Target workers does nothing to contradict with regard to *their* employer.

late winter: “it’s the slow time of the year so it would be like 25, 20, 30 [hours], it would go up like that. During the holidays I was working almost 40 hours and even overtime too.” A one-year in-stock worker from the same store says, “I get 38, 35, 38, 35 [hours], I don’t go below that,” except during “the low season, so then you hit 30, 29, 31. So it is not regular, it is not stabilized, it keeps changing.” And a three-year cashier remarks

You don’t get more than maybe 30 hours a week if that much. I got two kids I’m trying to take care of on 19 or 20 hours a week. So I mean it’s hard, I am always asking if I can stay late or if I can get an extra shift and my executive [ETL] will tell me, ‘oh, we don’t have the hours’ but then he is giving cashier hours to people that work on the sales floor.

Hour fluctuation significantly impacts Target workers’ weekly and seasonal pay rates, creating a broader base of payment insecurity than at Macy’s, where associates and support staff can expect at least a pre-determined range of hours, and many are guaranteed 37.5 per week.

The way hours change is partially tied to performance. “Does anything bad happen if the store doesn’t make its sales goals?” I ask a one-year softlines specialist, who herself has guaranteed full-time hours. “We don’t get to come to work!” she responds,

It happens like if we didn’t make it for the week, not for the day. For the week, I guess they generalize whose hours they need to cut, because they don’t really need cashiers because us sales floor people we can come downstairs as back-up so they cut their hours first, or if one person can do a job that five people could do in one day, they will make that one person come and do like a whole shift without anybody here.

Hours are raised or reduced depending on both store-wide and individual output. A first-year sales floor worker comments, “I was getting 20 to 25 hours but they recognize progress so I get about an average of 35 hours a week now.” This is a clear example of what Lambert (2008) has referred to as service employers’ “passing the buck”—the costs—of customer volatility onto employees, creating a “flexible” workplace whose flexibility overwhelmingly benefits the employer (see also Tilly 1996). For a one-year sales-floor worker, this cost-loading onto workers

appears almost common-sense: “you know it’s retail, they schedule according to how the system operates, according to *their* needs” (emphasis added).

Overall job security is almost as tenuous as security of hours and weekly pay at Target. Turnover is high: “I’ve seen a lot of people come and go,” says a four-year sales floor worker, “I would say probably 85 percent of the team members that are here now weren’t here when I started back in 2007.” A three-year specialist and former team leader sees high turnover as endemic to the lower rungs of the Target hierarchy:

The higher in management you go the less it changes. The lower it goes the more it changes, all the way down to team members because team members can go like this [snaps his fingers]. Supervisors come and go a little less frequently, managers [ETLs] go even less frequently and then you have the senior executives and the store team lead who have been the same since the store opened. The higher up the chain the less it switches.

Part of the high turnover rate is undoubtedly “natural” attrition from a predominantly young workforce that earns relatively low pay while coping with unstable hours. But several interviewees indicated other, more official barriers to advancement—namely, the requirement of a college degree to become an ETL or progress towards one to become a TL. “The only way there is an opportunity for advancement,” says a one-year backroom worker, “is if the person has their degree, because to be an ETL you have to have your bachelor’s or associate’s.” A first year sales-floor worker also comments that “when you get to those [supervisory] positions, you have to have an education for it.”

Q: You mean like a bachelor’s degree?

A: Yeah, so they do push you to go to school so that you could get to those positions eventually.

Q: Do you think you need a bachelor’s to do that job or could you learn it by having worked there for a while?

A: I think you could do it just by having been there for a while. I don’t think it’s nothing too crazy, I think it is easy to get after a while.

As noted above, formal dismissal is a real possibility given three “write-ups” or a serious violation of behavioral policies. “If a guest hits you,” says a seven-year sales-floor worker, “you call AP [Asset Protection]. You cannot strike them back or you get fired—you will lose your job right then and there.” The three-year specialist and former team leader quoted earlier also described a more insidious process by which some supervisors “manage out” particular team members. Because there is no union at Target, or other employee association, there is no opportunity to appeal dismissals or loss of hours short of external legal action, which is beyond the means of most workers. “You’ve got to do your job or they will get rid of you,” says the first-year team member and teacher, “you are disposable right now. They will just get rid of you and hire somebody else and keep hiring somebody else for minimum wage [*sic*] because people need jobs.” A three-year in-stock worker states that “a lot of people get fired about nonsense because we don’t really have a union.”

Starting pay is thus higher at Target than at Macy’s, but frontline wages have a lower ceiling; benefit provision (or lack thereof) is roughly equivalent at both companies while job security is quite low for frontline Target workers, and certainly lower than for their counterparts at unionized Macy’s stores.

Working Conditions

If starting pay is somewhat higher and job, hours and payment security lower at Target than at Macy’s, working conditions are broadly similar, with one important exception: due to the higher level of task integration and collectivization within Target—their just-in-time product flow, which depends on customer service and checkout—there are more opportunities for mistakes or malfunctions in one area or on a given shift to negatively affect operations elsewhere

or at later points in time. Erratic scheduling, understaffing and physical fatigue are similar to these equivalent issues at Macy's.

“If I open,” says a one-year specialist, “someone else will close. They won't know what they are doing and everything will be messed up. And I will come in in the morning and have to fix everything, so sometimes that is frustrating.” A two-year cashier finds that there is “sometimes no communication between floors,” which creates difficulties when a customer needs a price check: “there are times when we are left with no walkie[-talkie], no PDA,” she continues, “so we have to call the department and wait and wait—I had a guest wait almost half an hour for a price.” If items are stocked on the wrong shelves or falsely priced, the task of explaining this incongruence falls to cashiers: “that's a problem we have that guests sometimes don't understand—maybe people in Target put the wrong item on the wrong shelf” (1st-year cashier); “they get upset with me because it's \$6.99,” says a two-year cashier, “which is not really my fault, because I have nothing to do with the pricing.” Problems at one point of the in-store supply chain can thus have ripple effects further down, often culminating at the check-out lanes. And this tendency is sometimes aggravated by register malfunctions: “a lot of the register lines are messed up,” says the same two-year cashier,

so that means customers can't use them. If you have a certain amount of cashiers here and we only have 26 lanes so seven of them are messed up and only 19 work, you have 25 cashiers and only certain ones can get in the lane. The other ones are just considered 'breakers'—they give other people breaks.

The volume of customers in Target's New York City stores is also extremely high, which strains the just-in-time inventory system beyond its original parameters for lower-volume suburban stores. This tests workers' ability to keep up. “Everybody here is just so fast,” says the first-year team member and teacher, who previously worked at a suburban Target in Oregon,

Boom, boom, boom, mine, mine, mine, help me, help me. In [Oregon] there is not as much going on in the store as there is here. People buy so much here, so maybe some have come to this Target and had a bad experience when nothing is in stock. I get that a lot—‘nothing is in stock here!’ Forget Saturday, it’s probably all gone!

“Every night we receive trucks,” says a three-year in-stock worker, “but we don’t know exactly what comes in the trucks, so if it doesn’t come then we are out [the next day]. And that’s one thing guests complain about a lot.” Maintaining the flow is not always a smooth operation—the gullies and dams created by customer surges and technical malfunctions pose fairly constant challenges for New York Target workers.

Scheduling, staffing and the amount of physical exertion required of team members are interwoven with this ebb-and-flow cycle. Management, as was seen in the last section, attempts to match staffing levels as closely as possible to customer volume. But this is always a guessing game, which, when it fails, can lead to understaffing and extended shifts for those present, or short-notice call-in shifts for others. The complex rules about “compliance”—that primarily consist in workers taking their legally mandated breaks—are stretched by managers to their limits in understaffed situations. “With the breaks they have this time grid to tell us when to go,” says a two-year cashier

and they don't follow it. Not never, but a lot of times they don't. They come over to you and ask, ‘can we push it back like five or ten minutes?’ Fine, but a lot of the times when it is that time you see on the paper and you go for your break, they ask you ‘where are you going?’ Well, I'm going for my break. ‘You can't [they say], you have to wait until someone comes and relieves you.’ Well you have it down on the paper, you have people coming in, why aren't you putting them on the register so we can go on our break?

“Not that they are understaffed,” says another cashier, herself a three-year Target employee, “but if they gave us better hours everything could overlap so that there would always be coverage.” A first-year sales-floor worker describes sometimes working “double shifts, about twelve or thirteen hours” on short notice to cover staff shortages. She also recounts a recent early morning

call-in: “My team lead calls me at 7:30 in the morning and was like, ‘can you come into work right now?’ and I was like ‘come on’ so she was like, ‘okay, come in at ten’ and I said okay. But I was so tired.” Call-in shifts are not uncommon at Target, and are mentioned by many respondents. “They will just call you and ask if you can come in or not,” says a first-year sales-floor worker. The call-in practice is part and parcel of Target’s ‘flexible’ scheduling system, but it reflects the short-notice, just-in-time and often harried nature of store-level working conditions.

The final aspect to be considered is that of physical deprivation, which at Target is much the same as at Macy’s. “Working at Target,” says a three-year in-stock worker, “it’s a lot of walking, it’s a lot of being on your feet.” An eleven-year sales-floor worker, herself over 60, finds it “a little stressful at times because you stand in one place, I don’t like that.” And a four-year cashier in her mid-30s remarks that “by the time I get home my feet are hurting so bad.” Bodily stresses and strains of this sort are endemic to retail and many frontline service jobs; Target is no exception. But reports of injury, pain or other forms of discomfort were not prominent across interviewees’ descriptions of their work.

Unsanitary conditions, unlike at Macy’s, were rarely mentioned by Target workers, but erratic scheduling was a more common complaint, combined with a greater potential for daily hang-ups and malfunctions due to the higher level of interdependency among departments. On the whole, however, working conditions at Target appear to be no more adverse than those at Macy’s.

Managerial Style

Everything is pretty open; the team leads who are over me are pretty open. I don’t feel that they are just like me—they are a step ahead of me but they don’t try to use their authority over me or anything like that. (2-year cashier)

The model of the store is Fast, Fun and Friendly. But the whole friendly situation doesn't work out that well. We are fast but not always fun and not friendly. My exec [ETL], he is a pain—nobody can stand him and we would love for him to leave. (1st-year backroom worker).

Patterns of supervision at Target are much more unified than at Macy's. Whereas the latter company's unionized stores exhibit an unevenness in managerial style between formal adversarialism (or what Kochan *et al.* refer to as a "high-conflict/low-trust pattern" [1986, 85]) and less formal team-building (or what Smith refers to as "participative management" [2001, 80]), Target managers almost exclusively pursue the second strategy and to much greater depth than their Macy's counterparts. Even in comparison with other large, non-union service employers where some interviewees had previously worked—such as Walmart, McDonald's and CVS—Target appears more deeply committed to the consensus-based approach: "I have seen a lot of other companies," says a three-year Target food server who previously worked at McDonald's, "I have seen managers talking to people like they are dirt. But they don't do that here; they don't talk to you like you dirt." As the third quote above and reports from other team members make clear, however, Target's "participative" management is not without its limits and contradictions. In what follows, I outline four main prongs of this managerial strategy—interpersonal style, open-door policy, team-building efforts and welfarism—describing not only the characteristics of each but also their degrees of success and failure in creating harmonious workplace relations or what Jacoby calls "a vertical culture of unity" between workers and managers (1997, 53).

"It's a very good relationship," says a one-year backroom worker about his interactions with team leaders, "we are very close, we are able to talk to them. Maybe sometimes it's [a] personal [issue] and you could probably go talk to them." A first-year sales-floor worker finds

the relationship “friendly, it’s comfortable; they don’t make you feel not comfortable.” And a one-year in-stock worker describes this dynamic in greater detail:

The team leader, if today a task wasn’t satisfactory, he will tell you, ‘hey, what’s up? Did you not sleep well last night? What is your normal routine, why do you keep making mistakes? Please, please, please, I beg you, make sure when you’re working you have a sound mind, you should focus, leave all your problems in your house.’ And he makes sure he talks to you like a brother.

Many Target workers describe their relationships with supervisors in similarly effusive terms:

“cool,” “friendly,” “chill,” “like family.” During one interview with a first-year sales-floor worker a woman wearing Target’s trademark red-and-khaki walks by, to whom the interviewee jokingly calls out, “What are you looking at? [receives stuck-out tongue in response] Punk!” “She is one of my managers,” explains the young woman after her manager has passed, “she’s cool. She is all nosy, always bothering me and I always bother her. But it’s a joke, we just joke around.” The three-year food server who previously worked at McDonald’s finds his Target managers to be “the nicest bosses I have ever had in my life.”

The sheer volume and consistency of such reports is too great to dismiss as happenstance. Rather, the “friendliness,” patience and informal approach of many Target supervisors towards frontline workers reflects a deliberately supportive, non-adversarial style propagated by the higher rungs of corporate management. “Being Friendly,” states the employee handbook about the Fast, Fun, Friendly motto, “is lending a hand, talking through a problem, offering to listen and letting your own personality shine through”; one page later, under the heading “Best for Team Members,” the same handbook praises a “culture where team members can feel comfortable talking honestly with leadership” (Target 2008, 9). While such overtures are not uncommon in many corporations’ statements about their employee relations, it appears Target

has done a better job than many contemporaries at diffusing these policies down the hierarchy and translating them into daily practice.

“Close” and “friendly” management, however, can sometimes feel like micromanaging. “I wanted to transfer out of this store, just a fresh start,” explains a one-year softlines specialist, “and they were like ‘no, you are the best for the department’; they just wanted me to stay forever, like a mother who won't let go of their child.” A two-year cashier finds managers’ informal style condescending: “A lot of them speak to you like a child and I am an adult with my own kids. I don’t even talk to my kids the way they try to talk to me.” A four-year sales-floor worker finds that in order to avoid reprimand, “you’ve got to be doing something, you’ve got to be communicating with your managers consistently,” and a first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s employee, unlike her current co-worker quoted at the start of this section, believes that

Managers don’t know how to communicate at Target or at Macy’s—they don’t know how to talk to people. It’s like they are cut off from that or something, it’s like once they get hired as managers they get all this power and now they don’t know how to talk to you like you are a person.

Personality and favoritism, as in the structure of control, also play a significant role. “The way we get treated,” says a first-year sales-floor worker,

is kind of different between each of them [two team leaders] because they are very different personalities. One is lenient, he doesn’t want to come down on people, he just gives you a task and expects you to do it; the other one is kind of harping on you all the time and she seems to get stressed out by her ETL, then she brings that down on us.

Although Target has done a superior job of spreading the human-relations gospel among first-level supervisors, this task will remain incomplete as long as such individuals include personal preference in their decision-making, which seems difficult to eradicate. As a three-year specialist and former team leader puts it, “I know a lot of team leaders, if they were hiring would hire a girl for their department just because she's pretty.” And a seven-year sales-floor worker

believes in-group ethnic bias has dissuaded her current team leader from promoting her: “They can pick and choose. Your favorite? That’s the one. I’m the only Spanish [Hispanic] one on the team, the other ones are all the same kind [Afro-Caribbean].”

One of the formal mechanisms for encouraging cooperative worker-manager relations is Target’s “Open Door Policy,” a common component of many corporate human-relations strategies. Simply stated in the employee handbook, the policy means “You can go to any leader with your thoughts or concerns” (Target 2008, 37). Worker input is sought systematically through annual employee surveys, the institution of an “Employee Relations and Integrity Hotline,” the “Let Us Know” program, which consists of anonymous suggestion boxes in each store, and at multiple daily “huddles” conducted at the store and departmental levels. Team members are familiar with this policy, such as this first-year sales-floor worker:

The one thing I like about it is they have this open-door policy, the man in charge of the whole Target [store] his name is [Dave] and we can talk to him anytime about anything and whatever we want as employees, they really work hard to get it. The other day I was clocking in and one of the persons, I know she has a high position, she was like, ‘hey, come in let’s talk.’ And she just pulled three of us and she was like, ‘what you think? What is going on? Any issues? Anything you want to fix? Anything you like? Anything you don’t like?’

A two-year sales-floor worker refers to it as “that open-door policy thing where any team member who feels a certain way can just walk into the office.” In practice, however, he notes that “they do prefer that you go to the team lead you are assigned to as a first encounter,” i.e. not to bypass the in-store hierarchy. When I ask a four-year cashier about the policy, she replies “yeah, but I don’t really know how it works. If I got a problem I just keep it to myself and move on.” One type of complaint, however, for which she and others have observed both use of and response by management to the open-door policy is anything involving sexual harassment:

“Target has open-door and they are very strict on sexual harassment; you can’t say nothing out of

the way and if someone makes you feel uncomfortable they will look into it and you [the guilty party] will be fired.” This and similar claims are supported by the extensive space dedicated in the employee handbook to the company’s harassment prevention and reporting procedures.

“Huddles” are another corporate-instituted forum for advancing the open-door policy and engendering cooperative relationships. They are also the primary, though not the only means by which Target attempts to imbue workers with a “team” mentality that extends not only to their coworkers but also to supervisors. A store-wide huddle takes place each morning at eight o’clock and “each section has their own little huddle throughout the day,” says a first-year backroom worker, “the morning huddle is just to get everything kicked off and let everyone know what’s going on in the store.” Store-wide sales goals and their recent attainment (or not) are discussed at these meetings, which typically last from five to fifteen minutes, as well as any new display-building, stocking or customer service projects. But in addition to such practical matters, team leaders “talk about if it’s somebody’s birthday or if somebody has an anniversary,⁴⁴ and they will give us samples from Starbuck’s if there is a new drink” (1st-year sales-floor worker). Team members are publicly “recognized” by team leaders or fellow team members for doing good work or reprimanded, by team leaders only, for “hitting compliance”:

If you hit compliance your name is also called—it's like public embarrassment, sort of. Nobody really looks at it that way but that's exactly what it is, they point you out in front of everybody and say ‘you messed up so you need to fix that.’ (1st-year backroom worker)

Some workers find the huddle helpful: “we actually get a breakdown,” says a one-year sales-floor worker, “we get a perspective on what’s going to happen that very day.” A first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s associate states that “Macy’s just had one huddle in the morning but didn’t have anything for the evening shift, you just had to rely on people telling or

⁴⁴ She later explains that “anniversary” refers not to someone’s date of marriage but to their date of hire at Target.

not telling [us] what was going on.” A four-year sales-floor worker finds them rejuvenating: “if I’m tired at the end of the day but then I do the huddle and I’m ready to go!” Cashiers, however, are largely excluded: “sometimes cashiers go [to the huddle] but it’s mostly people from the back who are there” reports a first-year cashier. And although Target’s huddles are designed as forums for worker input and dialogue with managers—approximating the “quality circles” of Japanese auto makers—they are largely manager-run: “They are pretty open to any suggestions,” remarks the first-year sales-floor worker and teacher,

but nobody really says too much in the huddles besides the team leads—they are usually telling us what to do in the backroom or why hours are not being dispersed to everybody because we are not making sales goals and the hours are getting cut.

A final definitive aspect of Target’s managerial style is welfarism. Prior to the Great Depression a number of American companies experimented with what later analysts termed “welfare capitalism” (Edwards 1979; Jacoby 1997), consisting of employee benefits such as housing, healthcare and recreation facilities, as well as profit-sharing plans, generally higher wages and in some cases the institution of internal “company unions”.⁴⁵ Target, as has been seen, does not provide high wages or employment guarantees to team members; neither has it instituted any employee association or “company union,” since these have been illegal since the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. What it does offer, however, are a number of small-scale benefits and activities—free food, “recognition,” philanthropic excursions and an in-store counselor—aimed at reinforcing cooperative, non-adversarial relations between workers and managers.

“Sometimes we have cereal day,” states a first-year sales-floor worker,

where they have a bunch of cereal in the break room. They have a milk and cookies day, things like that which kind of make work—a lot of people, they don’t have money to buy

⁴⁵ Many such plans were pursued by large retailers, as Leach (1993) points out, and in the case of Sears Roebuck, continued well into the post-Depression/post-war era (Jacoby 1997).

food every day, so there is always stuff in the break room, like peanut butter and jelly with bread.

“Target is a fun place to work,” says the three-year in-stock worker who previously argued a link between low job security and union absence. “There are movie days, cereal days; movie days are usually on Tuesday and sometimes on Friday it’s pizza day.” And a three-year food server who formerly worked at McDonald’s and receives Medicaid states

You could have a chip day, or cookies, or something just to say thanks for your hard work and it’s not like just because our numbers look good, but if they do then tomorrow we might have burger day or hotdogs. That’s a great thing because some people can’t bring lunch to work!

Several respondents similarly praised Target’s free food provision because ‘others’ or ‘some people’ were unable to afford their own food; none of these individuals, however, drew a link between Target’s low wages and this inability to buy.

Each store also provides a “counselor” whom employees are encouraged to visit “if anything is going on at home, for whatever reason you can go in and talk. Because their whole thing is they want you to be comfortable, they don’t want you to have too much on your mind while at work so you can focus” (1st-year sales-floor worker). The presence of in-store counselors is part of the company’s “Employee Assistance Program,” other parts of which are a hotline and a website where workers can look up information “to help address issues you or your dependents are facing” such as financial, legal, child- or elderly-care needs (Target 2008, 32). Last but not least are the company’s much-touted philanthropic efforts, which team members are encouraged to participate in, such as New York City’s breast cancer walk or AIDS-research fundraising events. “There is a lot of volunteer stuff that Target does as a corporation,” says a two-year cashier.

They sometimes re-take or give stuff away to different events. When you walk through the team [member] area in the back they have pictures posted up saying that we did this and have pictures to show we give away food to feed the homeless.

The goal of Target's welfare efforts appear to be twofold: on the one hand, supporting management's effort to create cooperative, harmonious, non-adversarial relations with frontline workers; on the other, to distract or dissuade low-wage, contingent employees from the reality of their employment situation. In the case of respondents who simultaneously welcome free food while acknowledging workers' inability to afford it, Target's pursuit of this second goal has met with at least partial success.

Anti-Unionism at Target

One cumulative goal of Target's employment relations appears to be union-avoidance. Early on in the employee handbook, the company succinctly states its "union philosophy," which I reproduce here in full:

We believe in solving issues and concerns by working together with your help and input. Target wants to continue to create the kind of workplace where team members don't want or need union representation to resolve issues. *We don't believe a union or any third-party representative would improve anything for you, our guests or the company.* There are a lot of great things that go along with being a Target team member and you don't need to go to an outside party to get them. (Target 2008, pp. 18-19; emphasis added)

"It's no secret," says a one-year sales-floor worker, "Target doesn't do unions." A first-year sales-floor worker who had previously worked at a *unionized* Macy's in Maryland notes "I didn't really hear too much about union organization until I started working here at Target." Unionism is a feature of employment relations at New York Macy's stores; *anti-unionism* is a feature at Target. Management actively pursues the goal of union avoidance through frequent discussions with workers, starting at their orientation, periodic screenings of anti-union videos and constant vigilance by supervisors for organizers within or near the stores or for union sympathizers among

the workforce. Indeed, the goal of union avoidance and its primary objective in suppressing wages are also stated in the company's 2012 annual report:

With approximately 365,000 team members, our workforce costs represent our largest operating expense, and our business is dependent on our ability to attract, train and retain qualified team members. Many of those team members are in entry-level or part-time positions with historically high turnover rates. Our ability to meet our labor needs while controlling our costs is subject to external factors such as unemployment levels, prevailing wage rates, collective bargaining efforts, health care and other benefit costs and changing demographics...As of March 15, 2012, none of our team members were working under collective bargaining agreements. We are periodically subject to labor organizing efforts. If we become subject to one or more collective bargaining agreements in the future, it could adversely affect our labor costs and how we operate our business. (Target 2012a, 6)

Several interviewees expressed fear of being fired or having their hours cut if managers were to suspect them of union activity. A one-year backroom worker had to clarify that I was not a union organizer before he would agree to be interviewed; when asked why this was important he remarked, "because I don't want to get in trouble."

In the spring of 2011 an organizing campaign was initiated at a Target store in Valley Stream, NY just beyond the city limits (see Becker forthcoming). Though it ultimately failed after a majority of the store's workers voted against representation in an NLRB election, the campaign had a wider impact across Target stores in the New York area. The union involved, Local 1500 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), claimed it was reaching out to Target workers at more than twenty stores in the region. Target, it appears, took notice. "I think Valley Stream was trying to go union," relates a three-year cashier six months after the campaign, "one of the main executives [ETLs] was pulling a bunch of people into rooms and telling them, 'look, if these people come in, don't even bother talking to them.'" A first-year backroom worker at another store states that during the spring of 2011, Target managers

had a discussion with us about union people coming to the store and having a discussion with us, whether we want to join or not. They [managers] are not influencing us in any

way to not join the union. ‘If you choose to join the union by all means go ahead, we don't care’ [they said]. But after the discussion most of us were basically like ‘no’ for the union. They even asked us, some of our team leads asked us, ‘would you want to join the union?’ And they would come to you and talk to you about it. They would speak to us individually; they would pick out certain people and talk to us about joining the union.

A four-year sales-floor worker, when asked if she had ever heard talk about unions at her store, reports that “the first time was when I got back, the first week I got back” from a seasonal hiatus in May 2011. “I watched the movie and I heard about Valley Stream,” she says, “I really didn’t care to see the video; they pulled me away from my work section and I was like, ‘what am I doing here?’ And they made us [watch it].”

The video she and others were required to watch was likely Target’s thirteen-minute short-film, “Think Hard Before You Sign,” widely accessible on the internet. In it, a white man and an African-American woman, both in team-member attire, walk Target employees through a series of “facts” about unions, why they want to organize Target, and why this is “not in the best interest of the company or the team members”. Target’s open-door policy and team-based philosophy are explicitly used to discourage workers from joining a union “or any third party”: “our team environment,” states Jim Rowader, Target’s Director of Labor Relations who makes a cameo in the film, “strives to create a clear, direct path of communication.” A graph accurately depicting decline in U.S. union membership since the 1950s is then displayed while the actors recite a number of reasons why unions were once important—“child labor,” “health and safety”—but are now obsolete—“these are all laws today”. The take-home message is that contemporary unions are greedy businesses—“that’s right, I said business” states the white male actor—that seek workers’ dues money without providing anything in return. To underline this last claim, the actress reminds viewers that “management can simply say ‘no’ to union demands,” reaffirming the privileged role of the corporation to make all final decisions. The final

words are the male actor stating, “Refuse to sign...and keep Target union free,” emphasized in text as the frame stops.

Although screening of this film and other union-prevention efforts appear to have peaked at New York Target stores around the time of the Valley Stream campaign, longer-term employees note that similar activities have been a feature of workplace life for years. An eleven-year sales-floor worker recounts that earlier in her tenure, “they tried to make Target a union [store] at one time but they didn’t allow it—anybody that agreed with it would get fired.”

Q: Did people come to the store and ask you to sign up for it?

A: Yeah, but you had to say no because they didn’t want a union here.

Q: Did managers say you have to say no?

A: Yeah, because otherwise you get fired.

A three-year in-stock worker at a different store describes the fallout from a similarly abortive organizing drive during his time:

A: They were trying to get a union but it didn’t work out. I just know that whenever you start orientation they try to say that we don’t need a union. Some people was trying to get a union and they say that we don’t need a union.

Q: Were you one of them?

A: No, I wasn’t one of them.

Q: What happened to the people who were? Did they get fired?

A: No they didn’t but most of them left. My one friend got fired because of misplaced keys, and of course some people because of attendance, too many call-outs, they got fired too. But some people call out every week and they are still on the job.

“Union people has come to the store,” relates a seven-year sales-floor worker, herself a former garment worker and union member, “and they said no, no, no, no. As one [supporter] from all the 600 employees in the store I would lose my job.” She states that she is “in favor of the union, but nobody else is.” When I ask why, she responds:

They scared. They scared that they gonna lose their job, and they need the job. A lot of people say ‘no I don’t want to lose my job’. Like they will watch you if you speak to a union representative outside the store, and they do, they send people because they have under-covers working for the store. I know all of them but there’s people that don’t know them. I spoke with them [the under-covers] outside and everything!

No other respondents, and certainly none of Target's official publications, mention the use of under-cover agents as part of the company's strategy, though this is not unheard of among discount retailers (Adams 2006; Lichtenstein 2009, 118-48). But multiple accounts of Target workers show that the company *does* pursue such a program with a wide range of tactics, and not simply as a short-term response to the 'crisis' of an organizing drive. If workers' reports are true—and it's hard to imagine why *all* of them would not be—that managers threatened to or did terminate workers for union activity, then Target's strategy can be said to embrace the blatantly illegal alongside more nebulous, but typically legal dissuasion tactics. Finally, the content of the company's anti-union overtures—their explicit reference to Target's team-based and "open-door" policies—lends credence to many critical analyses of "participatory management" systems: namely, that they are aimed at preventing the formation of unions or other organized challenges to managerial authority (Hodson 1996; Moody 1997, 85-113).

The Workers Themselves

I now turn to a more focused consideration of the Target workers I interviewed: their backgrounds, primarily age, ethnicity, education and family situations, as they relate to the modified categories of dual labor market theory: secondary, short-term primary and long-term primary. Given these categories and profiles of the individuals who fall into them, I next turn to an analysis of workers' expectations, finding that these—again—largely correlate with workers' labor-market positions.

Backgrounds

In two respects, age and ethnicity, Target workers appear to differ from their Macy's counterparts. Among my two samples, 18 out of 31 Macy's workers were under the age of 30 while 24 out of 31 Target workers were. Within both samples, workers of Caribbean origin made up the largest single ethnic group—unsurprising since this is the largest ethnic group in New York City (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999)—but by a greater margin at Target (12 out of 31 as opposed to 7 out of 31 at Macy's). The composition of store-level workforces also points toward a younger and more Caribbean-dominated group at Target than at Macy's. In what follows I draw on workers' accounts to paint a picture of the age and ethnic compositions of the stores studied; then, as in the preceding analysis of Macy's, I profile several individuals from each of the three labor-market groups.

Many respondents described a predominantly young workforce at Target. “All of those who I work with,” states a one-year in-stock worker in his late 20s, “I am older than them.” When I ask a first-year cashier how many of his coworkers are under the age of 30, he responds, “In the cashier department I would say 60 to 70 percent are younger [than 30], some people are older, like 50 or 60, but most are young and most people are students.” A three-year specialist and former team leader states that

There are a lot of college kids in there and they don't look at Target as their career. A lot of college kids who are looking to major in something else—this is just something to pay their phone bill and buy them clothes. There is a certain handful that is really ambitious and wants to get promoted, but I would say more of the other than of them.

And a seven-year sales-floor worker in her early 50s confirms the general picture of youth and her own anomalous position:

Q: Do you think management tries to hire more young people as team members?

A: Yeah, they are a student training industry. In this job they have gone through team members like crazy. And what they are trying to do with the older ones is to get them out so that they can hire new ones and make them part-time. But since they don't have nothing on me they can't just fire me.

This same woman, herself of Hispanic background, sees herself in the minority not only with regard to age, but also ethnicity:

A lot of times they [coworkers] start talking, they Jamaican or they Trinidadian and they start trying to talk like that [in dialect] and other people can think they talking about them and this and that. But I don't talk Spanish in the store; I talk English because a lot of them don't know Spanish and I don't want—I want to avoid those conflicts.

Of the three Target stores studied, two had a high concentration of workers with Caribbean immigrant backgrounds. “This store is mostly Caribbean,” says a four-year sales-floor worker at the same store as the woman just quoted, himself from Guyana, “a lot of people are Caribbean.” When I ask a first-year sales-floor worker at the same store whether people of Caribbean origin make up a large portion of the workforce, her response is “yes, very large, very large; I think it's the location,” given that the store is adjacent to one of the largest Caribbean neighborhoods in the city. “Is that your own background?” I ask. “No, I'm American black,” she replies, “I get that Caribbean a lot but I'm not.” And a first-year backroom worker believes this ethnic concentration is due to the confluence of Target's referral hiring process, on the one hand, and ethnic solidarity among members of New York's Caribbean community on the other:

OK, I work at Target and eventually one of my friends who is from the Caribbean is more than likely—I'm not saying I don't have American friends but mostly my Caribbean friends who I hang out with most of the time, we do most things together, whether it's going to high school, running track or whatever, that's how we run. We tend to stick together and one of them was like, ‘oh, [Travis],⁴⁶ I need a job.’ I'm the one who said I got a job here and that's how it gets out. And we have so many Caribbean people here because wherever you go, they go, that's how it goes.

At two of the three stores, Caribbean individuals thus made up a preponderance of Target's frontline workforce; the third store exhibited a wider mix of ethnic backgrounds, with no single group dominating. But at all three stores, interviewees indicated that a majority of their co-workers were younger, college-aged individuals, who often enough were also students.

⁴⁶ This and all other interviewees' names are pseudonyms.

Kendra is one of these. She is twenty years old and recently graduated from a local community college with an associate's degree in photography. "I live with my mom and my dad and my brother and my cousin and my uncle," she tells me. Kendra has worked at Target for a little under a year, and doesn't pay her own rent, though she covers some utilities for herself and her brother: "on Friday I had to pay my phone bill and my brother's phone bill and then I went out. But me, I spend my check the same day I get it," she continues, "I go shopping a lot, it's a problem." When I ask if it would be hard to support herself on her Target income, she replies, "yeah, I would have to have another job. I think this is enough for just rent, but no food and no clothes; I would have to stop shopping."

Davian, unlike Kendra who is African-American, is from the Caribbean. "I'm from Guyana," he says,

I came up here in 2005. I graduated high school there and then I came up here because there's really nothing to do there jobwise, people just hang out. My father sent [for] me because he was up here a long time before me, so I just came up here to go to school and try to find a better job.

Davian is currently a junior at a four-year college and uses his Target income to pay his tuition while living with his father. "The younger people like us," he says "we just work and try to pay for school, I pay my own tuition." He works as close to full-time hours as his class schedule and Target managers will allow, which is difficult "because sometimes they cut hours." "But I don't really stress about less hours," he says, "because I just want to make enough so I can pay for my school, it's not that much of a burden. The older people—mostly they support their family off this," which he thinks "has to be hard."

Like Davian, Aria has a Caribbean background though she herself grew up in New York. She is also in college and has worked at Target on and off for four years. "I've been working [here] since I was 16, I'm 20 now," she says, "It was just like a summer job that turned into a

school job, but I really want an internship next summer so I don't plan on coming back.” Aria lives with family and doesn't pay for rent or other necessities. After she describes a time when managers “cut ten hours from everybody” I ask whether this had a big effect on her: “not so much because I don't pay rent, but for other people yeah. People asked me for hours, like, ‘do you have a day you want to give up? Because I need to make so-and-so many hours.’”

Kendra, Davian, Aria and the majority of Target interviewees (20 out of 31) fall into the “secondary” labor market: while income from their employment at Target is certainly not trivial—in Davian's case allowing him to attend college—it is also not required to provide for basic necessities like food, rent and healthcare, either for themselves or dependents. But a third of my respondents *did* have to provide these things for themselves. There is a distinction between those in this group who have the formal credentials, typically a bachelor's degree, that could win them entry to higher paying jobs in the future (“short-term” primary workers) and those who lack such credentials and thus have few options other than frontline, “unskilled” jobs such as in retail (“long-term” primary workers). Of the eleven respondents who fell into the overall “primary” group, four could be categorized as “short-term” and seven as “long-term”.

Amy is perhaps most indicative of the *short-term* primary group. A public school teacher from Oregon, she is white, single, 40 years old and in early 2010 was diagnosed with cancer.

Later that year she lost her teaching job due to state-level budget cuts.

I wasn't as stressed going through chemo and radiation as I was when I lost my job. I was like, what am I going to do? I needed insurance because I wasn't on any insurance; I would have to pay \$720 a month to keep COBRA, I can't afford that especially when I have a \$1000 mortgage. Where am I going to get \$1700 a month just to pay those two bills? Plus food, gas, my car. I applied to minimum wage jobs, Dick's Sporting-Goods, Macy's, and then when I saw the wages I was like, I can't take that as a full-time job.

In September of that year she began working part-time at a Target store in Oregon while substitute teaching. The following summer she moved to New York and obtained a transfer

position at one of the stores I studied. “I took a transfer because I wanted to move out here and get a teaching job,” she says, “I transferred here for that purpose and on my off days I try to find teaching jobs.” Amy does not plan to stay at Target—or in retail—for longer than she has to.

Jonathan also belongs to the short-term primary group, and for him it can’t be short enough. During his first two years at Target he advanced from team member to team leader while taking classes towards his bachelor’s degree in business management, which he has since completed. But when his son was born it complicated this arrangement: “Some days I couldn’t stay [late], I had to watch my son. They gave me an ultimatum: keep going the way you are going and whatever happens happens, or you could leave now and come back.” Jonathan took the second option and left Target for several months, returning as a specialist in his old department, though with greater pessimism about his chances for promotion. “Being the bad economy right now,” he says,

the degree only goes so far. I majored in business management and look, I’m working in the field and I can’t even get ahead. They hiring new people with less credentials for higher positions at Target and I have been working there longer and they still haven’t promoted me for nothing.

Before working at Target, Jonathan, who is African American and in his late twenties, briefly held a union job as a traffic checker with the transit authority; he left it on the advice of his father who said that with a college degree, he could do better. “To this day,” states Jonathan, “I regret leaving that job.”

It is important to reiterate that Amy, Jonathan and others like them are not considered “short-term” primary workers because their tenure at Target will inevitably be brief—given prolonged economic stagnation and government austerity, combined with personal and contingent factors, they could find themselves excluded from higher-wage work for an extended period. Rather, their employment as frontline workers at Target is described as “short-term”

because A) their formal credentials, at least in theory, do qualify them for higher-paying or managerial jobs, and B) they are actively seeking and/or looking toward such transitions. Long-term primary workers are then those who lack such credentials and, in most cases stemming from this, are not actively seeking other types of work since little other than frontline service jobs are on offer to workers of their training in New York today. And at Target, as at Macy's, this latter labor-market category largely overlaps with those in the over-30 age bracket.

Sabina is in this group. Born in Puerto Rico, she is in her early 50s, has worked at Target for seven years, has two children (one of whom is still a dependent) and no college degree. "At the age I am," she tells me, "a lot of people don't want to hire [you]—it's the truth, they are hiring younger people." Before coming to Target, Sabina worked for five years at a unionized garment factory, "and before that I was sixteen years a bartender. It has its ups and downs," she says about working at Target, "but you keep your nose clean, you do what you have to do and you are fine." Sabina is able to obtain a minimum of 32 hours per week at Target, sometimes more, mainly through her extensive cross-training in a number of departments and pro-active approach to picking up shifts when others call out. Although she works as close to full-time hours as possible, she must rely on Medicaid for healthcare and lives in public housing. "It's not easy," she tells me about making ends meet on low-wage work in New York, "I had to be a survivor, I had to be a bitch on wheels. If you have been a bartender for sixteen years and then after-hours have to help your kids through school, you gotta be a fucked up bitch." Sabina was not looking for other jobs at the time we spoke.

Like Sabina, Ethel is also without a college degree (or other formal credentials) and was not looking for other work at the time I interviewed her. Ethel is 37, from Barbados and moved to the U.S. in her twenties. She has worked at various Target stores for a total of four years,

including multi-year stints in Georgia and Texas before transferring to a New York store several months before our interview. Working at Target “is not a career” for her: “being a cashier at Target is just a job.” When I ask what she means by this, she replies “the pay is too low and sometimes they don’t promote from within.” Ethel pays her share of the rent in an apartment shared with her cousin and was the only interviewee enrolled in Target’s healthcare plan. Though not looking (or able) to leave Target in the near future, she recently began taking courses towards an associate’s degree in medical office management, which would eventually qualify her for higher paying and—in her words—more comfortable work outside of retail. “It’s hard to work in retail,” Ethel says, “it’s very hard, takes a lot out of you.”

The external factor that closely correlated with workers’ labor-market positions at both Macy’s and Target was age: older workers (typically 30 and up) were more often primary and long-term at that, while younger workers (typically under 30) were more often in the secondary or short-term primary groups. And much like at Macy’s, there is a similar correlation between Target workers’ job-related expectations and their labor-market positions, to which I now turn.

Expectations

Among Macy’s respondents, secondary and short-term primary workers had broadly similar *utilitarian* job expectations, with the latter slightly more attuned to the lack of remuneration and the former somewhat more interested in a fun and sociable work environment. Long-term primary workers at Macy’s, while even more desirous of livable wages and benefits, also wanted social recognition of their acquired skills and knowledge—a form of occupational identity. At Target, secondary and short-term primary workers also seek fair pay for their work and many value an enjoyable workplace as well, but among long-term primary workers few

expressed the sort of occupational identity and hopes of recognition as their Macy's counterparts. In the next two chapters, I will argue that this lack of identity-formation is partially the result of a deskilling process that can be observed between the two companies' models of work organization.

"To me," says a one-year in-stock worker and recent West African immigrant, "I see Target as a form of springboard. Because if I quit Target I hit the classroom, I go back to school." "Retail," he continues, "is a place to start life, a place to learn experiences, not a place to be forever." For him, working at Target is a chance to "save something" while acquainting himself with American culture and living with family members before he begins what he sees as his real career: teaching. A first-year, native-born sales-floor worker and college student at the same store has similar short-run expectations:

I don't see myself here in five years, I can say that real quick and easy. It has nothing to do with managers or pay, it's just me personally and what goals I see for myself. I feel like I would just be settling with Target and that is not something I want to settle for.

And a first-year cashier and recent South American immigrant who expressed a form of culture shock at the consumption-driven anxiety of American shoppers,⁴⁷ similarly does not see herself at Target long-term: "This is my first job, I am looking for another one; I am looking to improve my knowledge, I don't see myself as a cashier long-term." When I ask whether this is mainly due to the low pay, she responds in the negative: "No, because I just don't see myself as a cashier. I would rather work in an open environment. I want to do something that helps, not something that is so consuming" (by which she appears to mean 'consumption-oriented' not 'engrossing').

⁴⁷ "As a cashier I get the opportunity to see and just observe. Really funny people! You see this anxiety in their faces when they are giving you the card to pay something, like checking all the time the tickets on the stuff. And you see how many people buy silly things like \$200 worth of candy and pay with an EBT card. It seems so strange because I have seen so many situations in other countries and I am like oh my God, what are you doing? But I just see and learn how people behave, how this society behaves."

Expressions such as these are common among younger, secondary workers: with very few exceptions, they plan to leave Target—and retail, for that matter—within the next five years (or sooner) and thus expect from their employment little other than adequate pay for their current needs and a pleasant work environment. “It’s not like I’m saying it’s a bad environment to work in,” says a first-year, native-born sales-floor worker, “it’s not bad, it’s great. I’m just saying it’s not my career, so when I’m done with school I’m gonna find a new job.” A one-year backroom worker sums up the expectations of most secondary workers at Target when he says, “I don’t want to stay here the rest of my life. I’m in school and I’m majoring in accounting, but I wouldn’t like to stay here for a long time. I just come, do what I have to, make my money and then leave.” When I ask what he means by “a long time” he responds, “at the most, two-and-a-half years total.”

For short-term primary workers expectations are much the same, such as for this first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s associate with a bachelor’s degree in psychology:

Q: Do you plan to be at Target five years from now?

A: [laughs] No I don’t! I was giving myself a year because honestly I graduated last year and I just didn’t want to go back into retail after Macy’s, but as soon as I applied for this job I got a call that same day.

But as with several short-term primary workers at Macy’s, this woman, who lives with her mother but pays her portion of the rent, has a heightened awareness of the gulf between her Target pay and a living wage: as she previously stated, “If I had a child, this \$9.60 would not be cutting it.” Jonathan, the three-year specialist quoted earlier who also falls into the short-term primary group, doesn’t “worry about being promoted. Retail? I don’t care about being in there—if it happens it happens.” His hourly pay went up by \$0.75 when he was promoted from team member to specialist, but to him, “It’s just an underpaid position. I always tell people and they laugh, \$0.75 for my responsibilities which went up 75 percent; it’s just a lot sometimes.” And it

is useful to recall the opinion of Amy, another short-term primary worker, on the yawning gap between her monthly expenses and even a full-time Target paycheck. The short-term primary workers interviewed at Target express expectations similar to their counterparts at Macy's.

The expectations of long-term primary workers, similarly, are generally congruent with those of equivalent Macy's workers, insofar as they have heightened demands for equitable pay and benefits. But few of them display the kind of craft-pride and hopes for recognition as those at Macy's. One such individual at Target is Jared. Jared has been a sales-floor worker at Target for one year, immigrated three years earlier from Jamaica and worked a variety of frontline service jobs in the intervening period. He has a high-school education, is thirty years old and receives healthcare through his wife's employer, the IRS. Jared is not actively looking for other jobs and does not plan to pursue tertiary education, but when I ask him where he sees himself in five years, he replies, "not in red and khaki, no. Something else, but not in red and khaki. Five years from now I want to have my own house in some other state." When I ask him what kind of work he would like to do then, he says "I would say that the garbage pays a lot—the Department of Sanitation. Five years from now I just want to have a house and I want to live good, maybe like you."⁴⁸

Audrey, who is a three-year cashier—and white, single, mother of two and lacking college credentials—makes no mention in our one-hour interview of seeking other jobs or career paths despite her obvious dissatisfaction with the low hours, low pay and what she sees as Target's condescending managers: "I got two kids I'm trying to take care of on nineteen or

⁴⁸ At this point in the interview, the degree of social distance between a white, native-born graduate student (myself) and a black, foreign-born retail worker became apparent, as Jared seemed to assume that I lived in a detached single-family home and had an income several factors larger than his. When I informed him that I lived in a one-bedroom apartment in a predominantly Caribbean neighborhood and earned, on an annual basis, perhaps three or four thousand dollars more than he, Jared paused for a minute before stating, "I don't know, I just want to have the best paying job."

twenty hours a week, so I mean it's hard.” Her expectations are perhaps those of an earlier generation of frontline retail workers in New York City who enjoyed (and to some extent, still do) the benefits of unionization. “My father used to work for Gristede’s [a unionized supermarket chain] and he was with [UFCW] Local 1500,” she says. On his income, he was able to support a family while receiving stable, full-time hours; for Audrey, neither are the case: “my paycheck was just \$350 for two weeks,” she tells me, “it's not just rent I have to take care of, I have two kids, the holidays are coming.”

But another long-term primary worker, Marvin, despite repeatedly praising his managers and the entire structure of workplace relations at Target, says that he would rather move on, not for monetary reasons, but for self-fulfillment: “I have different plans for myself, I sing so I would rather have a contract or something like that than still be here [in five years].” “I will put it like this,” he continues, “it’s a great place to be, for now; it’s a great ladder for life, working at Target. I am used to the work now, but it’s just like I’ve got a passion and my passion is music, so that’s basically why I don’t want to stay here.” Marvin, who is African-American, in his mid-30s and without college credentials, has worked at Target as a food server and cashier for three years. Compared with his experience in previous jobs at McDonald’s and an unnamed grocery store, he considers Target managers “the nicest bosses I’ve ever had.” But still, there appeared to be something about frontline retail work that inhibited him from committing to it—or *wanting* to commit to it—for the long-term. As with other long-term primary interviewees at Target, Marvin did not display the proto-occupational identity of several such workers at Macy’s.

These accounts suggest that none of those interviewed wanted to work at Target—or in retail—as frontline employees for longer than their external circumstances dictated. To the degree that it was feasible, given family support, former training or educational trajectories,

workers *expected* to move on from Target, or in a few cases to be promoted into management. While there, however, respondents' expectations (as at Macy's) largely varied in tandem with their personal situations and needs: those who did not need to support themselves in the basic sense (rent, food, healthcare, childcare) expected (and typically received) sufficient secondary pay, the acquisition of general workplace experience and a sociable, non-adversarial environment; those who *did* need to pay their own rent and other necessities expected better pay and, depending on their circumstances, healthcare coverage; finally, those among this latter group that had few prospects (due to lack of credentials) of leaving Target for higher-paying jobs in the short- to medium-term often expressed expectations of 'something better' for themselves in the future. In Jared's case this took a more utilitarian form—"the best paying job" he could find—while Marvin's reasoning was more qualitative—working at Target doesn't involve his "passion" and that's why he "has different plans" for himself.

Summary

This analysis of work at Target exposes several noteworthy trends. With regard to the functional organization of work, Target exhibits a more minute subdivision and pre-specification of tasks, these are more integrated and collectivized than those at Macy's, and Target team members enjoy a lower degree of overall autonomy than Macy's associates. This greater subdivision and collectivization is part and parcel of a larger restructuring of the product flow at Target in comparison to its more traditional counterpart: because Target orients towards a lower-income consumer spectrum and offers a wider range of products (household supplies, food, apparel, electronics, etc.) than Macy's, which is an upper-middle and overwhelmingly apparel-

oriented firm, it can more feasibly exploit economies of scale, speed and scope, enabled by greater standardization of its offerings.

One of the key aspects of store-level work organization is the just-in-time design of stocking and product replenishment, which requires an integrated in-store supply chain with more simplified tasks. This centrally organized flow of goods defines the labor process at Target, with frontline workers' tasks geared towards maintaining various aspects of this flow. Unlike Fordist labor processes in manufacturing, however, Target workers are not 'bound to their stations' but encouraged to interrupt stocking and maintenance tasks to help customers whenever they need it—in fact, this can be seen as an integral part of maintaining the flow of customers and goods through the store. Furthermore, Target workers regularly rotate or transfer between departments, enabled by extensive cross-training, yet another deviation from the Fordist model and towards a lean methodology .

Target is a low-wage employer on par with Macy's. However, its starting wages for frontline workers in New York City are *two full dollars* higher than at Macy's, which, while hardly within the "living wage" range for most people, says more about the inability of Local 1-S to bargain effectively for equitable pay, at least in recent years. Benefit provision was largely similar (and low) across both firms but the greater insecurity of hours—and job retention—at Target was one key area in which Local 1-S appears to have made an important difference at Macy's. The lack of unionization at Target, moreover, reflects first, a more unified 'participative' style of management based on a much-touted open-door policy, huddles, welfarism and a Disney-fied interpersonal style; second, an explicit and systematic anti-unionism that employs video screenings, captive audience meetings, vigilance for union organizers and quite likely forms of extra-legal intimidation of pro-union employees.

Lastly, workers at Target are younger on the whole than their Macy's counterparts, with the firm apparently 'targeting' college students or college-aged individuals in their hiring practices. This is not to say that all workers at Target are young and purely 'secondary' but that a greater proportion are such than at Macy's; the similarly lower (or non-existent) long-term expectations of such workers about their employment at Target—or in retail—augments the firm's stated objectives of maintaining a low-wage, non-union workforce.

Chapter 4. Regimes of Contingent Control

At the outset of this study, I posed four central questions: 1) How have service labor processes been transformed? 2) What are their current dynamics? 3) How do these shape workers' class consciousness? and 4) What are the best strategies for organizing low-wage service workers? In this shorter, analytical chapter I theoretically appraise the workplace data presented thus far to address the first two of these, drawing on hypotheses from chapter 1.

The primary contributions to the labor process debate considered in chapter 1 offered four competing claims about the trajectory of skill: 1) deskilling, 2) upgrading, 3) contestation, and 4) contingency. Here I employ a concept of skill that includes the first two intrinsic aspects—autonomy and task complexity (as per Spenner 1983; Mottaz 1985; Vallas 1987 and others)—and posits skill change within an *occupation* over time—not of the individual or the aggregate workforce *per se*, though these may occur as ancillary results. It is worth noting that a given occupation can change with regard to its internal skill content and/or via greater subdivision and “outsourcing” of its tasks to other, related occupations (e.g. from doctor to technician or from salesperson to cashier).

In chapter 1 I also identified seven ways in which service work may diverge from manufacturing: 1) emotional labor, 2) smaller workplaces with less collectivization, 3) more explicit sex-typing, 4) triadic workplace structures, 5) lower pay and job security, 6) improved working conditions, and 7) greater proportions of ‘secondary’ and immigrant workers. Because this study does not include an empirical analysis of manufacturing, I cannot assess ‘divergence’ but restrict myself to gauging the presence of these dynamics at Macy’s and Target.

My method of investigation is to use Macy’s and Target as proxy representatives of two historical phases of department store sales work: the ‘traditional’ and the discount. Though there

are limitations to this approach—whether Macy’s provides an accurate stand-in for historical forms—I have attempted to address this by choosing both unionized and older stores within the Macy’s chain that are more likely to retain historical practices in their operations. Furthermore, the strategy of comparing two or more contemporary workplaces or industries as models of different historical forms has a considerable and still-viable pedigree within the work and industrial relations literature (e.g. Blauner 1964; Edwards 1979; Smith 2001).

This chapter compares Macy’s and Target across each of the three labor-process dimensions (intrinsic, extrinsic, worker) in turn. With reference to Edwards’ (1979) tripartite schema of workplace control (simple, technical, bureaucratic) as an interpretive framework, I argue that none of these models adequately describes the organization of work at Macy’s and Target; rather, Target exemplifies a new model—*contingent control*, posited of large, for-profit service organizations—with Macy’s as a transitional form in which shifts towards this paradigm can also be observed.

Deskilling Emotional Labor

A crucial contribution to the study of service work is Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor: “labor [that] requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild 1983, 7; see also Wharton 2009). It is this unique *intrinsic* dimension of interactive service work that has long been used to set it apart from manufacturing and other types of non-interactive work. Retail sales is one of the oldest forms of interactive work (involving emotional labor) under capitalist relations.⁴⁹ Therefore, according to Braverman’s deskilling hypothesis, it should have undergone

⁴⁹ In contradistinction to interactive occupations such as teaching, medicine or prostitution that long pre-date retail but were not, and in many cases still are not, carried on under capitalist relations, properly speaking.

a process of degradation whereby the complexity of emotional tasks and the autonomy of frontline salespersons to perform them show a secular decline. Is this observed when the roles of salespersons (sales associates and sales-floor team members, respectively) at Macy's and Target are compared? To what extent has the change in skill levels between the two (or lack thereof) been accompanied by collectivization? How have such changes affected the triadic dynamics of the retail workplace? And what is the role of gender in all of this?

At Macy's the role of salespersons is not uniform across the store, but varies with the type and price of products and, to some extent, with the ownership structure (vendor-leased or Macy's owned) of departments. A dividing line based on commission vs. straight-hourly pay types runs between 'high-end' and 'low-end' departments and salespeople, respectively. The tasks of all salespersons are multiple, however, including an increasing number of cleaning, maintenance and register duties previously performed by a larger number of support staff and dedicated cashiers (now absent). Multi-tasking, and the complexity inherent in that, is thus ever-present for Macy's salespeople.

But selling itself is where most task-based complexity is registered. All salespersons have an incentive to achieve this whether they receive commission or not (due to the goals system for all associates) and selling effectively, especially in high-priced, commission-based departments such as men's suits or women's shoes, often requires extensive product knowledge that changes with the seasons, new fashions or product lines. A three-year Macy's associate from men's suits reported that it took him "almost a year" to become familiar enough to sell effectively, and associates from other commissioned departments reported similar, elongated learning curves. Respondents from *non*-commissioned departments also emphasized the necessity of maintaining product knowledge to aid their sales efforts and meet goals, such as the eleven-year associate

who found “it's good to know the jeans so you can inform the customer on how the fit is.” In several non-commissioned departments, however, it appeared that more knowledge and responsibility had been placed in the hands of specialists, with less required of hourly associates than their commission-earning counterparts.

Product knowledge, however, is only half the equation when it comes to selling, the other being interpersonal ability or, more directly, *emotional labor*. Macy's has attempted to standardize this through its MAGIC method, but this ‘method’ is less about reciting a rote script and memorizing set information (as at Target) than about getting associates to engage customers on a personal level, keep them talking and via this open-ended process to induce them to buy—possibly more than they originally planned to. Selling in this way contains an inherent unpredictability based on the different personalities, wants and financial means of customers: as a one-year specialist put it, “you can't come up to every customer the same way”; “improvising, it's really part of the job,” stated a first-year cosmetics associate. Ken Bordieri, Local 1-S president and former Macy's shoe salesman reported that “you have to keep your approach fresh—if you used the same spiel every time you would go out of your mind,” or simply fail to sell effectively. This kind of emotional labor that requires practitioners “to be patient and observant with customers” (1-year specialist), anticipate their needs and respond to them flexibly while applying considerable product knowledge is more equivalent to the deep acting performed by door-to-door insurance salespeople (Leidner 1993) or luxury hotel attendants (Sherman 2007) than the routinized surface acting of McDonald's or supermarket cashiers (Leidner 1993; Ritzer 1993; Tannock 2001; Tolich 1993). In and of itself, unpredictability requiring variability of interactive style constitutes a level of relative autonomy—freedom from rigid, externally-

determined procedures, at least with regard to sales input; sales output, as was seen, is tightly controlled.

At Target the situation is different. Sales-floor team members are constantly beset with re-shop and zoning tasks while customer service is relegated to the status of an *interruption*—albeit a prioritized one—of this primary function. With the sole exception of the electronics department, where team members are expected to advise customers and sell “attachments,” Target salespeople do not “sell” in the strict sense of proposing products for purchase and then closing that purchase. As a three-year specialist reported, “it is not a sales-based thing because we don't get commission”; a first-year team member and teacher described interactive tasks as “[b]eing readily available to guests at any time they need something—that is going to make sales.” Required, in-depth *product* knowledge is thus considerably lower for Target’s sales-floor team members than for Macy’s associates. It is replaced, to a certain extent, by a broader requisite *inventory* and *store-system* knowledge: knowing where items are, when they will be in (or out) of stock and how to find them using the PDA, walkie-talkie system or by asking the right co-workers. All tasks related to closing the purchase (ringing, processing payment, promoting the Target credit card and customer surveys) have been removed from the hands of salespeople and re-allocated to cashiers, a separate and even more rigidly standardized job category.

If customer interaction requires less product knowledge on the part of salespeople and its average length and significance (per customer) is reduced by the removal of both final purchase and related incentives then it can already be seen as more predictable and hence, less complex. But the complexity of emotional labor at Target is even further reduced by management’s imposition and regular enforcement of scripted interactions. “Can I help you find something?” is to be asked of all customers who come within ten feet of a salesperson and use of this phrase is

daily reinforced at huddles and one-on-one coaching sessions, as well as on the back of workers' company-supplied T-shirts. "Five minute drills" are also called "every half-hour or hour [in which] everybody—team members, team leads—stops whatever they are doing and stands in the race-track [large central aisle], greeting the guests with 'Can I help you find something?'" (2-year sales-floor team member). In a parallel yet opposite direction to the open-ended complexity of interactive work at Macy's, with its attendant autonomy of input, the simplification and routinization of interpersonal style at Target is combined with a reduction in salespersons' immediate task autonomy: they are told not only *what* to say, but *when* and in *which situations* to say it. This type of emotional labor can more accurately be described as *surface* rather than deep acting, and closely parallels the standardized interaction required of fast-food and supermarket cashiers, as well as many call-center attendants (Leidner 1993; Tannock 2001; Tolich 1993; Renneberg 2004).

From Macy's to Target, keeping the salesperson at the center of our vision, there is a decline in both the complexity of her tasks and the autonomy granted to perform them. This is the deskilling of emotional labor. Skeptics such as Attewell (1990) might counter that this concept of 'task complexity,' consisting as it does of both knowledge and unpredictability, is based on criteria that derive from the subjective worldview of the academic; he and others might also object that I (and others before) have included autonomy in my overall concept of skill. My responses are as follows: 1) If knowledge and unpredictability are subjectively-determined and hence invalid indicators of the complexity of tasks, what other, more objective indices should replace them? None seem readily apparent, and should there fail to actually *be* any, this would necessitate discarding the concept of skill entirely and thus hobbling the future study of work; I

have no such intention.⁵⁰ 2) As my concrete analysis of sales work at Macy's and Target shows, autonomy of task performance is closely intertwined with the complexity of tasks: simplification at Target is achieved through standardization, which itself implies heteronomy—the setting of a standard *by others*, not oneself, for what is to be done and how. Autonomy, therefore, is not extrinsic to skill on this analysis, but is in fact reaffirmed as a central pillar of that concept.

Moving from Macy's to Target, this time widening our vision to include support staff, stockers and cashiers as well as salespersons, we also see strong evidence of increased collectivization. Sales at Macy's, though collectively supported by logistics and stock workers and the maintenance tasks of the entire department, are carried out individually from customer contact to purchase. At Target, sales are accomplished collectively (and to a greater extent *self-*accomplished by customers) through the work of backroom, in-stock, sales-floor and front-lanes workers; and this whole process is aided by the design of the store and the company's ubiquitous advertising and branding, through which customers are trained what to expect and look for. Furthermore, workers across occupations are integrated in this process through a unified inventory system and its hand-held devices (PDAs), cross-departmental communication (walkie-talkies), frequent job rotation and store-level huddles. Thus the deskilling of the salesperson from traditional to discount retail has been accompanied by collectivization, reminiscent of the transition from craft to assembly-line production in many manufacturing industries.

Collectivized sales work, such as at Target, does require new skill sets—what Hampson and Junor refer to as “work process skills” (2010, 526) or what Harvey foresaw as skills of “adaptability” that “entail literacy, numeracy, the ability to follow instructions and to routinize

⁵⁰ A similar line of reasoning could also be used to deconstruct and discard most concepts (class, power, gender, ethnicity) central to social science, making future research quite difficult indeed. A significant vein of theoretical work—often under the moniker of ‘post-modernism’ or ‘post-structuralism’, but not always—has in fact made it its business to pursue this end almost exclusively. The fruits of such efforts, when not combined with the development of positive alternatives to dismantled concepts, are quite meager in this author's opinion.

tasks quickly” (2006 [1982], 109). Such skills, however, are *not* the skills of a salesperson: they are skills of operating and navigating the *Target system* or similar systems in other workplaces, much as the skills of a technician who programs smelting cycles in a modern steel plant are *not* those of a blacksmith but of an entirely different occupation. Moreover, adaptability and system knowledge do not provide contemporary service workers with the means of achieving labor-market closure or any advance in pay, security or social status. Instead, they may become the new baseline expected of most workers—but not a source of leverage or empowerment.

With regard to the triangle of “worker-manager-customer” relations, the impacts of deskilling and collectivization are both evident and strangely convergent (Bolton and Houlihan 2010). At both Macy’s and Target, workplace dynamics are fundamentally triadic given the presence of all three groups. At Target, however, customer interaction is more routinized and less significant (with regard to sales) than at Macy’s. Moreover, Macy’s workers are often more socially distant from their customers than Target workers, given the firm’s more up-market orientation and a high volume of tourists at the flagship Manhattan store. Despite this distance, however, Macy’s salespersons depend on customer cooperation to complete sales, often pursue extended, personal conversations to achieve this and have an incentive to forego managerial proscriptions (maintenance tasks, strict use of MAGIC) other than the selling imperative. Management-determined sales goals and particularly the credit-card quota were frequently cited sources of annoyance that many salespersons felt inhibited their ability to address customer needs. Taken together, these dynamics point towards a latent worker-customer rather than worker-manager alliance pattern at Macy’s.

At Target, the tight proscription of “Can I help you find something?” combined with the requirement that sales-floor workers interrupt tasks at any time to serve customers produced a

weaker alliance between the two, as well as some resentment by workers of management. Many workers prioritized their maintenance duties and found customer requests and their disheveling of displays to be a nuisance. This is not to say, however, that worker-customer *antagonism* was a prominent feature at Target: the social proximity of the two groups and the lower-stakes nature of their interactions—not having to end in *sales* to be successful—worked to ameliorate tensions. For cashiers, however, stakes were higher due to per-checkout speed scores while interaction was circumscribed in an equally rigid fashion. This appeared to engender a greater amount of friction between cashiers and customers, the latter of whom were often seen as obstacles to achieving a speedy checkout. Altogether, the triadic structuring of service tasks and control at Macy's and Target, though different, did not produce radically different alignments of workplace interest: Macy's workers showed slightly stronger affinity with customers vis-à-vis managers than their Target counterparts, but not markedly so.

With regard to gender, I found evidence of occupational sex-typing at both firms. Female and male salespersons were often placed in departments catering to a same-sex demographic: female salespersons in women's clothing departments, male salespersons in men's, though a few counter-examples were found in each. Macy's and Target, however, each had sales departments that were broadly gender-mixed. It was in the non-sales (or non-sales-floor) departments that more systematic and pay-relevant sex-typing was evident, particularly at Target: at its stores, cashiers and TMSC workers (HR and customer-service receptionists, essentially) were overwhelmingly female while stock and logistics workers were overwhelmingly male. At Macy's, this same imbalance was not directly present (mainly because there are no dedicated cashiers) but all references to stock and logistics workers indicated that they too were predominantly male: "stock is mostly stock guys," said a ten-year female specialist at Macy's,

“it's mostly guys that do the stock room. If it's ticketing and processing and stuff like that, we have a mixture of female and male, but if it's logistics, that is mostly guys.” At Target, such differences involved a pay gap—a dollar more in starting wages for logistics and electronics workers, departments that were majority male—and at Macy's there is some evidence of this as well, though not conclusive: “some of them make more,” said the same ten-year sales specialist, comparing herself to stock workers, “some of them make the same.” In terms of the gendered construction of emotional labor, there is no evidence that management at either store differentially defined interaction by gender: both Macy's and Target's service mottos (“MAGIC” and “Fast, Fun, Friendly”) are gender-neutral and uniform across sales departments. But women at each firm were more often placed in interactive positions than men, who were more likely to be given non-interactive, ‘manual’ jobs or sales positions that require greater ‘expertise’ and are correspondingly higher paid.⁵¹

What this indicates is that, even with the significant transformations that have accompanied the transition from traditional and discount department stores, the sex-typing of interactive work as ‘feminine’ has remained remarkably constant.⁵² This continuity supports Milkman's assertion that “[o]nce sex-typing takes root in an industry or occupation, it is extremely difficult to dislodge” (1987, 3); the corollary pay gap between male-typed and female-typed job categories at Target and possibly Macy's also supports her claim that “[m]ost of the [gender] pay gap” in macro-economic terms “is due to the concentration of women in poorly paid, low-status positions,” rather than the more blatantly unequal (though still common) practice of paying women less for the *same* jobs as men (*ibid*).

⁵¹ There is a long history of big-ticket, commission-sales jobs in retail being both sex-typed and preferentially remunerated for men rather than women (see Jacoby 1997, 95-142).

⁵² See Moreton (2009) for an extended historical analysis of similar, if even more trenchant, sex-typing of interactive vs. non-interactive jobs at Walmart.

From Taylorism to Toyotism in Employment Relations

The previous discussion allowed me to assess three claims about workplace change that dealt primarily with intrinsic aspects as well as the first four claims about service dynamics. The fourth claim about workplace change—contestation—however, integrates a conception of deskilling as a *tendency* with the potential for both worker resistance and management alterations of extrinsic aspects (pay/job security, managerial style and working conditions) to elicit consent. To assess *this* claim, combined with the fifth and sixth claims about service work—decreased pay/job security and improved conditions—I now compare employment relations at each firm.

The organization of Macy's sales work was described as *inverted Taylorism*, meaning an individualization of output combined with a de-division of tasks.⁵³ Taylorism as a managerial method, however, pertains not only to the structure and design of work, but also to a certain kind of relationship between managers and workers. In particular, it is noted for a marked antagonism toward (though recognition of) workers' interests in a moderate, self-managed work pace with adequate pay: in his own writings Taylor admitted that

...only about one man in eight was physically capable of handling 47½ tons per day [the amount he asked of lathe operators while a manager at Bethlehem Steel]...the one man in eight who was able to do this work was in no sense superior to the other men who were working on the gang. He merely happened to be a man of the type of the ox...a man so stupid that he was unfitted to do most kinds of laboring work, even. (quoted in Braverman 1974, 75)

Such a hostile and condescending attitude toward workers, when embodied in a coordinated managerial experiment pursued across a number of U.S. firms in the 1910s and 20s, provoked

⁵³ The interesting thing, however, is that the most Tayloristic aspect of Macy's work structure—the goals system which sets, individualizes and measures output across four sales dimensions—was in fact only instituted in its current form in 2009 across *all* Macy's stores, union and non-union alike. What this appears to show is that, rather than being relics of early 20th-century managerial approaches, the principles of Taylorism are alive and well, at least among the upper echelons of Macy's, Inc.

correspondingly hostile reactions from workers—the bulk of whom, according to Edwards (1979), were successful in undermining Taylorism as an effective strategy. But later iterations of the same “scientific” approach (Fordism and its variants) have also been implicated in the formation of mass industrial unions in the 1930s and 40s (Preis 1964; Lichtenstein 1982; Zeiger 1995). Over the next four decades, these organizations and the firms they bargained with set the standard for American industrial relations as an adversarial, dual-power model. Taylorism and its descendants, through their very objectifying approach to workplace relations, thus played a pivotal role in spawning this “high-conflict/low-trust” paradigm (Kochan *et al.* 1986).

And this is what I find still intact, though increasingly under pressure, at Macy’s New York stores: a formalized, adversarial relationship between workers and managers with considerable social distance between the two. Around the edges and with newer, younger workers, Macy’s managers have tried to emulate the contemporary non-union, “human-relations” approach: they hold daily meetings where they give “recognition” to high-selling associates; they praise associates with recognition cards and reward them with Macy’s money for goal attainment; and with younger workers, they often use a softer, more informal style than with older workers, and especially shop stewards. Against this backdrop, however, entry-level wages are just a notch above minimum and well below living wage estimates while erratic, management-determined scheduling is a prominent source of instability and deprivation. Local 1-S, despite its inability to raise entry-level wages and attain fixed schedules, has an active shop steward network and grievance system, protects members from arbitrary dismissal and came close to organizing a strike in 2011. These actions visibly conflict with managers’ ‘participative,’ ‘Toyotistic’ overtures, which many older and some younger workers perceive as a sham, an effort “to confuse their associates by giving them recognition” (2-year associate, mid-20s). The

uneasy coexistence of the adversarial, dual-power model with aspects of the ‘participative,’ non-union approach is thus the defining feature of employment relations at Macy’s.

Target, in contrast, is a brave new world of the fully non-union, ‘participative’ model: job ‘security’, weekly hours and scheduling are completely at the will of managers while wages, though two dollars higher for entry-level workers, have a lower ceiling and are likely lower on average than at Macy’s. The genesis of the team-oriented style that surrounds, and likely supports, these facts was in the early 1990s when directors of the Target division of Dayton-Hudson re-vamped employee relations with the help of Disney consultants, renaming customers “guests,” employees “team members” and instituting a host of team-oriented practices: huddles, the open-door policy, “great team member” cards, the regular provision of food and entertainment (what I have called welfarism), as well as the “one team, one dream” and “fast, fun, friendly” mottos. Such practices fall broadly in line with the managerial strategies pursued by Japanese manufacturers in the post-war era, and imitated by many U.S. employers in the 1980s and 90s (Ostermann 1994).

Following Dohse, Jürgens and Malsch (1985), I labeled the application of this approach at Target *service Toyotism*. Toyotism and its homegrown variants (see Kochan *et al.* 1986; Jacoby 1997; Moreton 2009) are noted for a much softer and more collaborative style than the brusque efficiency of Taylorism (evidenced by their respective names, “human relations” and “scientific management”). They also differ in their views of workplace interests: while Taylor himself, if not all followers of his method, recognized a disjuncture between the wants and needs of workers and those of management, the human relations approach, in most formulations, denies such conflict of interest, proposing instead a unitarian theory of industrial relations. The ultimate aim of this strategy is hotly debated, with critical analysts decrying the propagandistic nature of

such claims and describing the goals of ‘team-building’ as simply to co-opt workers to work harder, longer and for less money than they otherwise would. The proclamations of some team-work advocates support this characterization, such as that of a manager interviewed by Milkman in her study of Japanese-style factories in California: “Everything I do and breathe is designed to prevent a union from coming in here!” (1991, 104).

At Target I found strong evidence of similar union-prevention goals. Alongside its extensive program of “team work” the company also has a robust program of anti-unionism which, in its film adaptation, referred explicitly to the “team” idea to dissuade workers from organizing. Another claim made in the film was that unionization would “hurt our store’s ability to serve guests” by decreasing workers’ flexibility: “If the unions tried to organize Target,” states the white male actor, “they could also try to bring along their way of doing business—an old-fashioned, rigid structure.” While it stands that American unions often delineate job categories and tasks in their contracts (what Perlman [1928] and O’Grady [1995] call “job control unionism”), Target’s deeper point that limits to managerial and customer discretion are also contrary to workers’ interests is open propaganda. And here the company’s strategy departs doubly from Taylorism: first, insofar as it wholly denies interest conflict; second, insofar as it does not *itself* rigidly bind workers to particular roles—an aspect of both Taylorism and Fordism that American unions only later codified to protect their members from further speed-up and skill dilution (Jacoby 2004).⁵⁴

Target, for its part, has designed a labor process that would have been hard to implement in an active union environment such as Macy’s: greater subdivision and pre-specification of tasks, heightened collectivization and store-system knowledge, flexible allocation of workers

⁵⁴ See also Sabel (1982) for a discussion of the more flexible manufacturing labor processes employed in Germany under even more powerful industrial unions than those in America during the post-war (1945-75) era.

between departments and the standardization of a generic “friendly” attitude. The company’s non-union history⁵⁵ enabled these developments, much as the frailty of Japanese unions in the post-war era enabled the development of lean manufacturing methods there (Moody 1997, 85). At the same time, the continued functioning of Target’s work system does not *require* union absence: an effective union (from the standpoint of worker interests) could still allow for flexible allocation of workers, support the “friendly” attitude of salespersons, etc. What it would encroach on, necessarily, would be management’s ability to determine such allocation, as well as workers’ schedules, hours, wage levels, raises and promotions, *unilaterally*. Wage increases would likely also encroach on profits, but the degree of this in large, capital-intensive firms such as Target, Walmart or Macy’s is estimated to be small *even if* this were an important criterion for weighing the benefits of unionization.⁵⁶

In Edwards’, as well as Montgomery’s and Burawoy’s formulations of contestation theory, deskilling can be both counteracted by worker resistance and enabled by management’s alterations of extrinsic aspects (pay, security, style and conditions). As I moved from Macy’s to Target in my analysis of skill I found a downward trajectory. My consideration of employment relations at each firm, however, points to the limited potential for such deskilling to be fully realized at Macy’s given the presence of Local 1-S and its collective bargaining agreement, and the continued need for trained, knowledgeable sales staff in high-priced departments. Because

⁵⁵ During the biggest wave of department store organizing in the 1930s, managers at J.L. Hudson’s (later part of Dayton-Hudson) flagship store in Detroit successfully fended off unionization through extensive use of guards and premium pay for non-strikers (Kirstein 1950, 65-66). Only in 1990 was a union (UAW Local 3500) certified by the NLRB at a Westland, Michigan Hudson’s store (then part of Dayton-Hudson) which, due to the company’s legal challenges, did not obtain a first contract until 1998. In 2004 the store was part of a general sell-off by then-renamed Target Corporation of its department store division to Federated, which later became Macy’s, Inc.

⁵⁶ Reutschlin (2012) estimates that raising the wage floor for all workers at American retail firms with 1,000 or more employees (1,300 firms, five million workers) by 27 percent (from \$9.10 to \$12.25 per hour) would result in additional annual costs of \$20.8 billion; the annual profits of those same firms likely surpassed \$70 billion in 2012, not counting the billions more (\$24 billion in 2011 for just the top ten retailers) used to pay for “stock buybacks”.

Macy's orients towards the true middle—and in some cases, the upper⁵⁷—stratum of the consumer market, its freedom to standardize offerings and sales styles is more limited than that of downscale Target, its “cheap chic” image notwithstanding. In parallel but reverse fashion, the development of Target's flexibly routinized system has been aided by both its discount focus and the absence of organized worker resistance. Target's anti-unionism is evidence that management-driven flexibility in the *structure* of work is largely dependent on management-dominated “team-building” in the *relations* of work. Thus the deskilling of emotional labor found between Macy's and Target is not the result of some inexorable, pre-determined process; it is rather the outcome of contested negotiations between workers and managers, other firms' *learning* from these struggles, and the interaction between firms and their market environment, over an extended period of time. These findings support the claims of contestation theorists.

With regard to claims about decreased pay, job security and “improved” working conditions in the service sector, a few conclusions are in order. Between Macy's and Target there are roughly equivalent low wages (though with a lower floor and wider range at Macy's) and broadly similar working conditions. While “classic” forms of deprivation such as risk of injury and sheer physical exertion are not particularly pronounced at either store, both evinced erratic scheduling as a significant source of adversity. At Target, changing weekly schedules are also tied to fluctuating hour counts and thus have greater impact on frontline workers' pay. Though pay and benefits are low at both companies, job and hours security are lower at Target, due primarily to union absence.

Deflating Expectations

⁵⁷ The 2012 renovation of Macy's flagship Herald Square store included the installation of several new high-end designer-brand departments, such as Gucci, Burberry and Longchamp (McGee 2012).

The last of my hypotheses about services pertained not to the work itself but to the workers: that service firms hire larger proportions of secondary and immigrant employees. Here, I interrogate the degree to which these claims are true for Macy's and Target and whether a meaningful trend between the two firms' hiring practices can be identified. My analysis is of course limited by the lack of representative data on each firm's (or set of stores') workforces. Nonetheless, the views of respondents about the social composition of their coworkers, as well as their own backgrounds, provide useful vantage points from which to explore this hypothesis.

Macy's workforce is marked by considerable dualism. On the one hand, there is a sizeable group of middle-aged, full-time employees, often working in higher-priced or commission-based departments, who have been at Macy's for years and for whom their work provides a primary source of income. On the other hand, there is a larger group of younger, part-time workers, typically in lower-priced departments, for whom Macy's wages are often secondary. Of the thirteen respondents categorized as long-term primary, eight were native-born and five were born abroad; of the ten categorized as secondary, two were born abroad. And among the intermediary category—individuals with college credentials who planned to leave retail but whose current wages were vital—three out of eight were born abroad. With regard to the dualist structure, these intermediary cases appear to prove its existence by exception rather than negate it as a rule. But unlike age, which is a conspicuous covariate of the primary/secondary distinction at Macy's (all but two secondary and short-term primary respondents being under thirty, all but two long-term primary respondents over forty), nativity appears randomly distributed. So why does such a structure exist at Macy's and why or to what extent is it changing?

In the previous section I argued that deskilling at Macy's is limited by union presence and the firm's up-market orientation, requiring some skilled salespersons. These same factors—essentially, class struggle and competition—also help explain the dualist demography of Macy's workforce. Local 1-S, as was shown, has successfully maintained full-time hours at 37.5 per week (despite management's attempt in 2011 to reduce this) and set-hour ranges—part-time (20-35) and short-hour (12-20)—for non-full-timers. After three months of employment, all workers are protected from arbitrary dismissal by due-process rules and after five years from layoff.

Because of this security of hours and employment, some workers—even non-commissioned ones—remain at Macy's long enough to accrue considerable wage gains, such as the 31-year associate earning \$22.75 or the seven-year associate earning \$17.50 per hour; commissioned associates' wages enter this range even earlier and can potentially climb higher. Job security that enables wage stability and steady gains, as well as up-market departments that pay more from the start, allow *some* Macy's workers to support themselves completely from their income—placing them, if not comfortably, at least sustainably in the long-term primary category. Given this still existent room for sustainable primary work at Macy's, it is perhaps unsurprising that the firm is able to maintain a larger number of middle-aged and older workers on its staff. The flip side, of course, is the steady expansion of less-skilled, lower-paying and often part-time or short-hour jobs at Macy's, which are correspondingly filled by a greater number of younger secondary or short-term primary workers. This is made possible by the long-run deskilling of more down-market departments within Macy's (and other traditional department stores) where cheaper products are offered on a more self-service basis. There is likely more room for this low-skill, low-wage, low-retention category to expand but re-organizing Macy's entirely on this model would be to abandon higher ranges of the consumer

market, the only aspect that distinguishes the company from its downscale competitors (Target, Walmart, etc.).

Target, again, is different. Instead of dualism, young and secondary workers are here in the vast majority, at least during all open-hour shifts,⁵⁸ with older, primary workers relegated to a small minority within the stores. Of the eleven Target respondents categorized as short- and long-term primary workers due to their lack of primary-scale financial support, three were foreign-born and none were without *some* external income: for five this consisted of public assistance (social security, public housing, Medicaid), for two (Jared and Jonathan) it was an equivalent-earning spouse, for three it was a combined household with immediate or extended family members and for one (Amy) it was a higher-paying second job. This is in contrast to Macy's, where six out of 21 primary workers interviewed could provide for themselves independently of spousal, familial or public assistance.⁵⁹ The small layer of sustainable, primary yet *frontline* jobs at Macy's is thus all but absent at Target; it is therefore unsurprising that a larger portion of store-level workers hold secondary labor-market positions. Furthermore, of the 21 secondary workers at Target, eleven were born abroad (out of fourteen total) and two more had Caribbean immigrant parents. While again such non-representative figures are in no way conclusive, they appear to suggest a closer, positive relation between nativity and secondary labor-market status at Target than at Macy's.

What makes possible Target's greater use of secondary workers? First, the absence of unionism and high-priced departments; second, Target is a more deskilled workplace requiring fewer (if any) well-trained, well-paid salespersons. Because there is no union—or conversely, because Target pursues low-cost rather than robust welfarism—frontline staff have lower job and

⁵⁸ Overnight stock workers, as noted in chapter 3, were described by all interviewees who referenced them as typically older, non-college-aged individuals.

⁵⁹ Admittedly, all of these were single adults with no children or other dependents.

hours security than their Macy's counterparts, limiting their ability to achieve wage stability or cumulative gains. All of these factors dis-incentivize frontline Target work for anyone seeking a sustainable primary job.

And Target seems to know this: many interviewees reported that the firm was “great for students,” that managers allowed student employees to work around class schedules or take time off for final exams, and several thought the company seeks students for hire. This view is supported by the extensive “college students” page on the “careers” section of the company’s website, complete with video testimonials from student employees, as well as its depictions of team members in annual reviews and company webpages, which typically show smiling, ethnically-diverse groups of men and women, almost all of whom appear to be under the age of thirty (Target 2013; Target 2012a, 14-17). Whether the company specifically *targets* immigrants or the children of immigrants for hiring cannot be ascertained: both Macy’s and Target samples had similar proportions of immigrant workers (10 and 14, respectively) and each group described their company as racially and ethnically “diverse” in its hiring practices. What is clear is that Target, by its own admission and the reports of its workers, pursues more systematic referral hiring than Macy’s; in the context of an immigrant-rich city where people of Caribbean origin are the largest single group, it is then unsurprising that its New York stores have high proportions of both.⁶⁰

The claim about a higher density of ‘secondary’ workers is thus borne out more fully at Target than at Macy’s, though both employ high concentrations from this group. The second claim about increased proportions of immigrants in frontline service jobs is partially supported, but my evidence is hard to disentangle from the effects of referral hiring and the broader

⁶⁰ Kasinitz *et al.* (2008) provide perhaps the most systematic analysis of daily life and career trajectories among young, second- and “one-and-a-half”-generation immigrants in the New York metropolitan area; see in particular chapter 6 (173-204), “The Second Generation Goes to Work”.

composition of the New York City population, particularly its low-income brackets (Milkman *et al.* 2012; Sassen 2001). If Macy's is taken as representative of historically antecedent forms of service work and Target as more recent, a trend can be identified between the two towards increased utilization of non-primary, and particularly *younger* workers—a pattern noted by many analysts of services and precarious employment generally (e.g. Standing 2011). The extension of this hypothesis was that secondary workers would have, by-and-large, lower expectations of work, leading to a mitigation of class consciousness. Analysis in chapters 2 and 3 supported the first half of this claim, with secondary respondents at both firms displaying lower, more short-term expectations than their primary counterparts. To the extent that the transition from traditional to discount retailing has involved an expansion of secondary at the expense of primary workers, this appears to entail a deflating of worker expectations.

An Outline of Contingent Control

Thus far I have addressed initial hypotheses about the transformation of services and their current structure. Using Macy's and Target as key examples, I found that changes in the organization of sales work could be described as deskilling. The contested nature of these changes led me to assert the form of deskilling—contestation—associated with Edwards, Montgomery and Burawoy. Concerning the seven service-work hypotheses from chapter 1, I found evidence in support of claims 3, 4 and 5; the degree and intensity of emotional labor (claim 1) was found to decrease from Macy's to Target, while collectivization (claim 2) increased; working conditions (claim 6) were not substantially different at either firm but erratic scheduling was a source of adversity at both and had greater impact at Target due to workers' lack of guaranteed hours; the proportion of secondary workers (claim 7) was found to increase

from Macy's to Target while that of immigrant workers was more ambiguous and could not be separated from the environment in which the stores are situated.

My point of departure for the present discussion is Edwards' tripartite schema of workplace control systems: simple, technical and bureaucratic. Writing in the late 1970s, i.e. just before the wave of de-industrialization and de-unionization in the 1980s (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Goldfield 1987; Moody 1988), Edwards formulated this model to explain not only the historical evolution of workplace systems in the U.S. but also the divided structure of the U.S. working class and the attendant chances of its taking transformative collective action.

Much has changed since 1979, however. The "subordinate primary" category that Edwards equated with technically controlled, mass-production workplaces has been reduced from a mainstay to an anomaly. The "independent primary" group of professionals employed in bureaucratic settings has expanded relatively, but the guarantees and stability this group once enjoyed have been significantly altered if not greatly reduced (Tyler 2007). Finally, the heterogeneous "secondary" category filled by "simpl[y]" controlled small goods producers, "service," "retail" and "temporary...office work[ers]" (Edwards 1979, 179) has either nearly disappeared (in the first case) or greatly expanded (in the latter three), with frontline services increasingly organized by a finite number of large, publicly-traded corporations (Ritzer 1993; Schlosser 2001). "Simple control," understood as the informal, entrepreneurial organization of work can hardly be said to characterize the workplace relations of large service bureaucracies. "Technical control," understood as the assembly-line paradigm, certainly describes aspects of contemporary services, particularly at firms like Target, but their degrees of collectivization and machine-paced routinization are still far from those of the classic Fordist factory. And despite the fact that service corporations are undoubtedly "bureaucratic," the features of long-term worker

retention, material provision and promotion through internal labor markets indicative of *that* regime of control are not at all salient at the service workplaces I studied.

This begs the question: does the organization of frontline services at Macy's, Target and other corporations represent a new regime of control? If so, what are its defining features? And what are its internal tensions and contradictions? Here I answer the first question in the affirmative and the second and third by explicating four characteristics of an emergent regime of *contingent control* in the low-wage service workplace. I argue that Target is an ideal-typical representation of this while Macy's is an imperfect version—a workplace in transition but which faces key obstacles on its path to this new paradigm.

Contingent Employment

The primary feature of contingent control, as its name suggests, is the contingent nature of employment for the majority of workers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics narrowly defines “contingent workers” as “those who do not have an implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment” (U.S. BLS 2005). On the agency's broadest measure⁶¹ 5.7 million individuals or 4.1 percent of the entire U.S. workforce were estimated to fall into this group in 2005. In accordance with this definition, only workers employed on seasonal or limited-term contracts thus count as ‘contingent’. But analysts over the last several decades have noted the rapid spread of a variety of employment types described simply as “nonstandard” since they deviate from the mid-20th century model of indefinite employment with full-time hours (typically 35 to 40 per week) (Tilly 1996; Smith 1998; Kalleberg 2000). This general category of “part-time, temporary

⁶¹ “Workers who do not expect their jobs to last. Wage and salary workers are included even if they already have held the job for more than 1 year and expect to hold the job for at least an additional year. The self-employed and independent contractors are included if they expect their employment to last for an additional year or less and they had been self-employed or independent contractors for 1 year or less” (*ibid*).

and contract work” (Kalleberg 2000) has been referred to as “nonstandard” by some, “precarious” by others (Fudge and Owens 2006; Standing 2011), but the common feature of these arrangements—from the standpoint of the employer—is that such workers are *expendable* in the event of declining demand or the rise of new market opportunities. On an individual basis, such workers are hence *contingent* and not necessary to the continuing operation of a given firm. I thus use the term *contingent* to refer to part-time, temporary or otherwise “nonstandard” employment relations, both of are prevalent at Macy’s and Target.

‘Contingency’ as I have defined it can be produced in a number of ways. First, it can be embodied in the actual employment contract: Macy’s and Target each hire sizeable numbers of “seasonal” staff during the holidays and other peak shopping seasons whose terms of employment are 90 days or less; Macy’s, as was shown, also employs “on-call” workers who have no guarantees of work and, like their seasonal counterparts, cannot become members of Local 1-S. This strict form of contingency, however, covers only a minority of workers at each firm.

A second way of producing contingency is by denying guaranteed hours, even for indefinitely employed staff. At Macy’s there are three broad categories of employment—full-time, part-time and short-hour—each with a set weekly minimum (37.5, 20 and 12 hours, respectively). Despite management’s attempt to reduce full-time hours in the most recent contract, Local 1-S upheld the 37.5-hour standard, as well as the minimums for part-time and short-hour positions, thus limiting the production of greater contingency among its stores’ workforces. Target, in contrast, provides no guaranteed hours to anyone below specialists: weekly hours for team members, the vast majority of store-level workers, fluctuate from 40 or

more during high seasons to 20 or less during low ones, though individual exposure to such variation is tied to performance and in some cases, personal relations with supervisors.

A third way of producing contingency is through the outright denial of employment security. Because of Local 1-S, all Macy's workers employed for 90 days or more have the right to due process before dismissal and to arbitrated appeal afterwards; after five years they are also protected from lay-off, i.e. non-disciplinary dismissal. Target workers have no such rights or guarantees: they can be dismissed at any time by their supervisors and have no feasible way to appeal afterwards. The ability of managers to determine workers' weekly schedules at both firms, however, presents another means of decreasing employment security. At Target it was shown that team leaders and ETLs sometimes use inconvenient scheduling combined with hour-count reductions to "manage out" particular team members, i.e. make them quit. Though Macy's managers are unable to reduce workers' hours to the same degree, their freedom to set shifts allows for the use of similar, passive separation strategies.

The advantages for employers of a predominantly contingent over a predominantly "standard" workforce largely reduce to power, costs and flexibility. Power insofar as marginally attached, expendable employees are less likely or able than long-term core employees to challenge managerial authority; costs insofar as pro-rata pay and benefits are in almost all cases lower for the former; and flexibility insofar as workers can be hired and fired (or scheduled/not scheduled) to fit fluctuating demand—a feature more prominent in customer service industries than, e.g. capital goods manufacturing. Lower pay and benefits, when combined with limited chances for promotion, also constitute a fourth mechanism for the perpetuation of contingency: when the material rewards of employment are unsustainable for primary job seekers, many will simply leave in search of more remunerative work, creating a high-turnover workplace. At both

Macy's and Target there is evidence that employee turnover is high (though not as uniformly high at Macy's) and on par with reports from other frontline service workplaces (e.g. McDonald's [Leidner 1993; Tannock 2001] and Walmart [Lichtenstein 2009; Moreton 2009]).

Contingent employment is thus the defining feature of contingent control. It is more pronounced at Target than at Macy's, though the latter shows a clear tendency towards increasing contingency in its employment contracts. The question to be answered now is: what forms of work organization allow employers to make extensive use of contingent relations *without* impeding their ability to compete? My comparison of Macy's and Target shows that three aspects are decisive: standardized work, a 'benevolent' bureaucracy, and the utilization of a 'pliant' workforce.

Standardized Work

Contingent employment implies a high turnover workplace, or at least one with a high likelihood of separation. If tasks are specialized and require significant training, this naturally decreases workers' expendability and hence, the guiding purpose of contingency. In manufacturing, standardization of tasks was only fully achieved on the basis of *mass* production for *mass* markets, which in turn had to be actively created (see Aglietta 1979; Sabel 1982; Leach 1993). The creation of such markets in the mid-twentieth century provided necessary but not sufficient conditions for the standardization of customer service. The immediate post-war decades saw a continued expansion of high-service department stores and the rise of high-service specialty chains, alongside the burgeoning discount phenomenon (Cohen 2000; Zukin 2004). It was only in the 1970s and 80s that low-service discount shopping became a predominant mode of consumption, at which time the firms in this sector were considerably less concentrated than

they are today (Bluestone *et al.* 1981; Lichtenstein 2009). At present, three national firms—Walmart, Target and the K-Mart division of Sears Holdings—dominate the discount arena and the third is clearly in decline. Economies of scale (from the standpoint of the *firm* rather than the industry) and the market readiness for discount shopping that provided *sufficient* conditions for the standardization of sales work are thus relatively recent developments.

Discount retail and discount services generally, unlike their mid-range and upscale counterparts, are particularly amenable to standardization since price and dependability rather than service and variety are the main selling points. Target, for example, has been able to affect much greater standardization of its offerings than Macy's due to its decreased emphasis on brand and fashion and greater orientation towards household products (small appliances, cleaning supplies, etc.) that are inherently less varied than, e.g. sweaters or cologne. Because its offerings are more standardized, this lends itself to lower reliance on skilled salespersons, which at Target are almost completely absent (with the possible exception of electronics salespersons). But decreased reliance on workers' skill and knowledge does not in and of itself standardize tasks: the simplified stocking, maintenance and customer service duties of Target workers have been *actively* standardized and codified by management; team members' adherence to these norms is daily reinforced at huddles, in planograms, in talks with team leaders and, in the case of backroom, in-stock and front-lanes workers, on their computer and PDA screens.

Macy's, for its part, has attempted to standardize offerings and maintenance tasks as much as possible in lower-tier departments, while pursuing a half-hearted effort to standardize customer service with its MAGIC sales method (which, on its own terms, is quite open-ended). Yet the company still relies on skilled staff to move product in its myriad high-tier departments since only they can advise customers about highly varied or frequently changing merchandise as

well as persuade them to buy costly items that are often non-necessities. And even in low-tier, non-commissioned departments, Macy's depends on, and in fact (dis-) incentivizes via the goals system, the independent selling initiative—and oft-times also the knowledge—of frontline salespersons. Despite its seeming simplicity, open-ended interaction that must end in a purchase to be successful requires more of all Macy's salespersons than the generic helpfulness of their Target counterparts.

The more work can be and actually *is* standardized, the more leeway this allows companies to rely on contingent rather than full-time, long-term employees. Macy's and Target have both travelled far on this vector, but Target, again because of its downscale orientation and due to the pro-active, brand-conscious approach of its management, free of internal power checks (e.g. unions), has been able to travel further towards complete standardization of service tasks. Because of this, Target is able to make more extensive and efficient use of contingent labor than Macy's.

The Benevolent Bureaucracy

Standardization allows service employers to make greater use of contingent labor, but it also implies decreased autonomy for workers, which is not always an easy pill to swallow. Combined with low wages, benefits and job security—key components of contingent employment, at least in frontline services—management-driven standardization can readily engender disaffection and opposition. And in a service environment where deference and positive displays of feeling are prominent features of daily work, such resentment can have a negative impact on sales. Thus if contingency is used to reduce costs and the demands workers make of their employers, and task standardization is the structural innovation that enables this, what then are the shop-floor relations that minimize this potential friction? Here is where the

efficacy of Target's Disneyfied teamwork becomes readily apparent, as well as the middling results of Macy's half-hearted efforts.

Target presents itself as a company that cares. Although it pays team members low wages, provides them with no guaranteed hours or employment security and few affordable benefits, many interviewees—certainly more than at Macy's—had a favorable view of the company. It was not uncommon to hear reports such as “this is a great job, this is a great store” (1-year sales-floor worker); “I think Target is a good place, because we have people to talk to, counselors, if anything is going on at home” (1st-year sales-floor worker); or, “I think it is a fun place to work because everybody is cool and relaxed—they are people you can go to as a friend, even the managers” (2-year sales-floor worker). Target's package of human-relations techniques—team-building, open-door policy, informal style and welfarism—combined with the absence of any visible counterweight to these, appear to contribute toward such positive views among frontline workers.

But a more specific aspect of the company's approach also seems decisive: its daily communication during huddles of the ups and downs of sales volume and implication of these *external* variations in team members' varying hours and pay. “If we are consistently not making sales goals,” relates Amy, the first-year sales-floor worker and teacher, “then *we* are going to be short on giving people hours and pay because if we aren't making their goals *we* can't pay” (emphasis added). A one-year in-stock worker similarly believes that “Target cannot do anything; it is the guests who decide with their strength the profitability or success of Target—it's the guests.” In neither case are these individuals managers, stock-holders or in any way empowered to make decisions about workers' pay and schedules at Target. Yet Amy clearly identifies herself with management and despite being an active union member at her other job—

where she struggled against lay-off and loss of benefits—accepts the company’s claim that employee pay and hours must necessarily follow sales. The second worker, the recent West African immigrant encountered in chapter 3, accepts this logic as well and neither he nor Amy were alone in their views among the 31 Target respondents. Target, it appears, has done a superior job of integrating workers’ into the goals of management and outsourcing the blame for contingent relations onto customers or ‘the market’.

Macy’s, in contrast, pursues an “extreme individualization of the sales effort” (Ken Bordieri) that attempts to shift the blame for low sales onto individual workers (through the computerized goals system) rather than ‘customers’ in the aggregate. Macy’s management, as was shown, has introduced aspects of the human relations approach, including daily meetings, recognition cards, prizes and rewards (“Macy’s money”) and attempts at a softer, more informal style. But Local 1-S and its active shop-steward network act as visible counterweights to these unitarian efforts, such that they fail to engender the same ‘benevolent’ impression among Macy’s as among Target workers. Furthermore, Macy’s method of placing responsibility for sales almost exclusively onto individual workers is less able to deflect blame for low hours and pay onto customers or the store as a whole. Workers are then left with the options of either blaming themselves for contingent employment or blaming managers and by proxy the company; when many experience the arbitrariness of goal determination and the largely customer-determined basis of goal attainment (see chapter 2, sub-section on control), the latter is often chosen.

Human relations techniques,⁶² when pursued in a concerted, systematic fashion in the context of union absence—as at Target, but not at Macy’s New York stores—thus ease the worker-manager friction latent in the structure of standardized, contingent workplaces. They are also particularly useful in service environments for promoting positive, helpful and deferential

⁶² I equate these broadly with Toyotism’s managerial component.

attitudes among service workers. Yet as was seen throughout, ‘workers’ are not homogeneous: some are more receptive to team-based overtures than others, and it is to a consideration of the workforce demographics that enable the effectiveness of contingent control that I now turn.

A Pliant Workforce

Macy’s, as was shown, has a largely dualist workforce. On the one hand, there are large numbers of younger, secondary and transient workers, often employed in small-ticket sales departments or as support staff; on the other, there is a smaller, but not insignificant number of older, primary and more permanent workers employed mainly in big-ticket or commissioned sales departments. Target, in contrast, has an overwhelmingly young and secondary workforce, with a few older, primary workers mixed in. At both stores, however, older primary workers typically had higher expectations of their jobs with regard to pay and benefits, as well as equitable treatment by managers. It was among these workers at Macy’s and Target that managers’ attempts at ‘team-building’ were least effective, with the two-year Target cashier and single mother finding such efforts condescending: “A lot of them speak to you like a child and I am an adult with my own kids. I don’t even talk to my kids the way they try to talk to me.”

Team-building efforts or other managerial initiatives are inevitably more effective when workers have a predisposition to accept them. Although age, gender, ethnicity or labor-market status are never identical with such receptivity (or lack thereof), at both Macy’s and Target younger, secondary workers typically had lower, short-term hopes for their current jobs than older, primary workers. In the next chapter I will also show that they evince greater job satisfaction and less opposition to managers, strongly implying greater receptivity to ‘participative’ management techniques. The degree to which a company can recruit predominantly *young* and *secondary* workers, therefore, enhances its chances for successful

‘team-building’ via participative, human-relations approaches, which in turn limits the potential for friction in standardized, low-wage labor processes.

Target, I found, specifically orients towards college students and college-aged individuals in its hiring practices. This is achieved by providing flexible, part-time hours that students can adjust to fit class schedules, as well as the provision of a premium entry-level wage. Although \$9.50 per hour (or \$10.50 in the case of stock and electronics workers) is well below most living wage estimates and difficult, if not impossible to support oneself on independently of parental, spousal or government support, it is significantly higher than the starting wages for many other unskilled, entry-level positions, including those at Macy’s. Furthermore, Target explicitly hires through referral, allowing it to tap the often age-homogeneous (and in these cases, also ethnically homogeneous) networks of its current employees.

Macy’s hiring practices are increasingly convergent with Target’s, attempting to attract students and young people for hire in many of its lower-priced departments for part-time and short-hour positions. But again, the extent to which this is possible is limited by Macy’s more up-market orientation, requiring it to maintain a minority of specialized—and typically older—sales employees in its commission-based, high-priced departments. Macy’s must continue to employ some workers who, because of their labor-market position, are less likely to accept managerial overtures of ‘participation’. Contingent control, in its robust form, will thus be inherently more difficult to implement at mid-market service firms like Macy’s than at downscale ones like Target.

Summary

In this chapter I compared my findings from Macy’s and Target to assess two sets of hypotheses: those about service work’s long-term transformations and those about its current

dynamics. Using Macy's and Target as representatives of the traditional and discount modes of retailing, I found that work changes between the two for salespeople could accurately be described as *deskilling* achieved by a set of managerial initiatives that could, and to some extent have been, resisted; for this reason my findings supported the *contestation* model of workplace change.

With regard to service work's contemporary dynamics, I showed for the case of department store retail that 1) emotional labor is present but declining in intensity as one moved from traditional to discount modes; 2) collectivization is low but increasing with the same transition; 3) sex-typing of jobs is present and continuous between both models; 4) the dynamics of the service triangle have changed with the reduction of emotional labor, though its corollary—standardization—compensates somewhat for this change; 5) pay and job security are low and, with regard to the latter, decreasing in non-union discount environments; 6) working conditions were generally non-adverse but the increase of erratic scheduling at Target suggests a downward trajectory; and 7) there are large and increasing proportions of young and immigrant workers, though the latter finding is likely a contingent result of the case studies' locations.

After conducting this analytic exercise, I then constructed a four-part model of a new regime of control posited of low-wage service workplaces run by large, for-profit organizations. The four components of this regime are contingent employment, standardized work, the 'benevolent' bureaucracy and recruitment of a pliant workforce. Each of these four aspects were found to be interlocking, enabling the thorough functioning of the others and through this, making possible a workplace run almost entirely by low-wage, non-permanent, semi-attached employees with attendant reductions in costs and power challenges to management. An internal contradiction is evident, however, between the standardized structures and contingent relations

of work, on the one hand, and the team-oriented, ‘benevolent’ approach of management on the other—a contradiction softened, though not erased, by the utilization of a predominantly secondary workforce. In the next chapter I will explore this and other contradictions further, comparing Macy’s and Target workers’ class conscious attitudes.

Chapter 5. Class Consciousness on the Sales Floor

In the previous three chapters I interrogated the dynamics of work at Macy's and Target. I identified core differences and similarities between these two workplaces across intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics, an analysis which yielded, in chapter 4, preliminary answers to questions about the changing structures and current dynamics of service work. But the driving purpose behind the investigation of service labor processes was to assess their impact on worker consciousness—a category which has up till now only been hinted at through the expressions of workers in their descriptions of daily routines and personal backgrounds.

This chapter takes aim directly at the question of consciousness, specifically *class* consciousness, using the four dimensions of this concept derived in chapter 1—dissatisfaction, occupational identity, coworker solidarity and management opposition—as well as an additional category for workers' union receptivity (pro- or anti-) in their current workplace. Unlike chapters 2 and 3, but similarly to chapter 4, the present analysis proceeds via parallel comparison of workers' views from both sets of stores, employing these five categories as organizing themes. Careful review of each individual interview was used to code workers' views on each of the five consciousness categories as dichotomous values (yes or no), which are here analyzed as the possible dependent outcomes of workplace and demographic factors. The results of this exercise are illuminating, but remain only suggestive due to the small size and non-random nature of the interview sample.

Satisfaction

The concept and measurement of job satisfaction has been the subject of lengthy debates in the work and industrial relations literature, important themes of which were outlined in

chapter 1. When understood in a common-sense fashion, however, satisfaction can be taken to mean the extent to which workers hold positive views of their job, whether they find the daily experience pleasant or arduous and the reasons they give for this (pay, work environment, life circumstances, etc.). After careful consideration of the views of all 60 frontline workers interviewed at Macy's and Target (29 from Macy's—31 respondents minus one manager and one subcontracted merchandiser—and 31 from Target) a general disparity is evident with regard to satisfaction: 55 percent of Macy's workers expressed views that could be characterized as 'dissatisfied,' while only 39 percent of Target workers did so. But to understand why this disparity exists, workers' satisfaction must be understood on their own terms, which I now turn to.

At Macy's, more workers were dissatisfied than satisfied. Among those who expressed negative views, however, were also those who found sources of satisfaction in the variety of customer interaction and coworker relations, as well as through pride in their product knowledge or endearment to particular brands. And those who were positive about their work also often found the goals system distressing, the pay too low and frequent understaffing annoying. A four-year sales associate, a woman in her late 40s, finds that

There are so many other things we have to do besides make our goal, but it's weird because they have a point where sometimes we have to get our rods done, we have to do the dressing room and we have to go into the dressing room and do our rods, we might have to make recoveries. [There are] so many accidents because there are not enough people to handle each thing.

A six-year specialist concurs: "It's like that, it's pressure. Obviously in my case [as a specialist], it's pressure. And then I'll be at home and I wonder, 'did we put everything in the correct place?' So it's a lot of our own thinking, you've got to worry. It's high pressure for low wages." Both of these workers were more dissatisfied than satisfied with their jobs.

But an eleven-year non-commissioned associate in her mid-40s whose experience was largely positive also found that “within the past two years there is a lot more pressure; you would think we are a commissioned area. Every day if you don’t make a certain [sales] number, you get a lecture about why the number isn’t, why you didn’t make these numbers.” For her, positives were not things like “the healthcare, the wages, the treatment—they say we are supposed to be magical but sometimes we don’t get the magic,” but rather customer interaction:

The tourists can be interesting because they mostly are amazed by the store in general and I as well might be interested in Brazil or Canada or someplace like that I’ve never been. So we have conversations about things like that and I learn—a lot of them are friendly—I learn about a different country or a different town and they want to learn about here, about the escalators or how everyone on the floor greeted them or asked them for help and they don’t get that at home. So it’s good.

Joy in customer interaction was a common refrain from workers whose overall views were both positive and negative. A ten-year specialist comments that “what satisfies us is that we really help the customer, we put a smile on somebody’s face. But if you are looking at the company-wise, we are not really happy, but at least we service the customer.” And a two-year support worker, who frequently engages with customers, says “I really like to interact with people, I’m a people person. The main interaction with people, getting to see people from a lot of different places—that’s the benefit that I mostly like about it.” Not all interaction is smooth and enjoyable, however, with the same individual stating “you’ve got to put all your outside attitudes aside because you have to deal with a lot of [customer] attitude and emotion when you come in to work here.” The 31-year sales associate, who is “just seeing if I can get the hell out of here—I can’t take this crap anymore!” also finds that “sometimes [customers] are nasty, but you just have to learn to get over it otherwise you are going to get fired.” “Most of them are nice,” states a three-year commissioned associate, “but sometimes you get those arrogant people, they act like they are better than you.”

Wages, scheduling and the stress of the goals system were three of the most common sources of dissatisfaction among Macy's workers. "I'm just waiting for my transfer [to another department]," says a one-year branded specialist in her late 20s, "because all of this stress and pressure that they put on you, it's not worth it." An eighteen-year specialist and shop steward comments about the impact of the goals system:

Say I'm coming to help you and you're like, 'oh, I'm just looking.' And in my mind its just dollars, dollars, dollars and I'm thinking, 'ok, just make up your mind already,' so I say to the customer, 'you think about it, I will be right back' [laughs]. So where is the service?

"I think it's a tool and I understand what they're doing," says a seven-year male associate about the goals system, "but I think it's a very flawed system."

Erratic scheduling was also a common complaint, especially among those with children, like this two-year commissioned saleswoman:

In terms of my home life there is none. Because I have been on a wheel, I'm in the rat race, as people say. [If] you are doing a 9-to-5 you have time to go home; I don't even go to the supermarket, you are just tired all the time and the schedule doesn't take into account those things.

"When I get home my daughter is asleep," says a first-year specialist and mother, "then when I leave and have to go to work she's still asleep and sometimes she goes, 'mommy I never see you!' It's ridiculous." But even those without children often find Macy's hours—which many see as typical of retail—difficult:

A: Retail is terrible. It's terrible.

Q: Why do you say that?

A: The reason it's terrible is just because weekends is when everybody shops and no one likes to work on weekends and in retail you have to work weekends. You have to juggle all these hours, it's really difficult—retail is no joke. (1st-year associate in her early 20s)

For some, however, the 'flexibility' of Macy's schedules is an asset. A one-year associate in his early 20s who is "a musician, so I do a lot of other things on the side" responds as follows when

asked if he would prefer a set weekly schedule: “I think I would prefer to have flexibility because something is always coming up at different times during the day.” Overall though, his views on scheduling were in the minority of those interviewed.

Finally, low pay and the lack of affordable benefits were among the most common sources of dissatisfaction at Macy’s. “I know from other places they just don’t pay that great,” says a one-year specialist in her early 20s. “And you have a life, you have expenses, bills and I can’t live off nine dollars an hour. I still live with my mom, so thank God for that!” “I am lucky that I have some support,” notes a first-year associate, also in her early 20s, who shares an apartment at her friend’s parents’ house, “if I didn’t there is no way I could be living here—you can’t really live off of eight dollars an hour in New York City, there is no way.” “Are you able to make ends meet on Macy’s pay?” I ask a four-year specialist who lives by himself, “no” he answers, “our Macy’s salary is really really low. It’s a minimum salary, they pay minimum wages.” “It’s not fair,” states a five-year female specialist from the same department, “a company like that they should be starting people at fifteen or ten dollars an hour, not seven, not minimum wage.”⁶³ But again, some have made at least temporary peace with this state of affairs. A two-year associate who had previously been a Target manager states

Yeah it’s tough to be on your feet, yeah it doesn’t pay that well, but there’s good things about it: they shut the lights off at 10 pm and I’m outta here, I only have to work two nights a week, I work at a cool place, I get cool merchandise. So it’s like any other job: you get comfortable with it, change involves risk, and what if it [a new job] doesn’t work out?

“In retail,” says the young, first-year associate quoted earlier, “most people pay minimum wage so eight dollars, I guess, is better.” And the one-year male associate who is a musician on the side finds that “you get used to the fact that I work for a company that is rich and I’m just a sales

⁶³ As noted in chapter 2, the lowest starting wages at Macy’s during the time of study was \$7.50, slightly above the minimum wage in New York of \$7.25 at that time.

associate. It doesn't bother me too much. As long as I'm not working too crazy hard, for my age and for retail as a whole it's not really that much for me to do."

In contrast to Macy's, the majority of Target respondents were satisfied with their jobs. This does not mean they were content to stay there forever: as one three-year food server put it, "it's a great place to be, for now—it's a great ladder for life, working at Target." But it was not uncommon to hear effusive positive statements about the store and their work from salespersons, stock workers and cashiers. "All in all, it's a great place to work," says the same three-year food server, "we have appreciation days for team members, it's not just you work and go home, they volunteer here, we do get outside of the job, they have appreciation days." "Well this is my longest job so far," states a first sales-floor worker, "and I love my job because it's like no other place." "What's different?" I ask. "Everything," he replies, "the energy, the people, everything." "I want to come back," says a first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy's employee about her attitude at the end of a typical shift. "I didn't really get that feeling from Macy's, it wasn't like a family. Target is like a family. It's a better working atmosphere than Macy's."

The experience of work at Target, however, is by no means uniformly rosy. Although many respondents saw their pay as relatively high with respect to other retailers (including Macy's), most found it insufficient as a primary source of income; customer interactions were more often described in negative, antagonistic terms and more Target workers cited boredom, repetition and monotony as sources of deprivation than their Macy's counterparts—among cashiers this was particularly pronounced.

"For me it is fun," says a four-year sales-floor worker and college student. "Some people like the more reserved job, you know the desk job, but I have to be doing something active where I see people every day." When I ask about wages, however, his tone changes: "that's the one

thing I do think could be better. I don't think the pay is fair for the job that we do. It's a little bit too low." A three-year male stock worker believes that "if the wages were higher it would be different, people would stick around [longer]. I do enjoy working with Target but if the wages were better I would probably stick around." And for the seven-year sales-floor attendant and former garment worker, the impact of low wages is compounded by low and unpredictable hours:

I fight for 40 hours a week. I don't tell you that it's enormous but at least if I do my 80 hours every two weeks I could pay all my bills, get my unlimited seven-day Metro card, have to spend 70 or 80 dollars, sometimes 90, sometimes 100, but they cutting hours, I gotta take care of the bills. It's a hassle going around the store looking for hours when you've been there so long, and why should you move [your shift]? If you're the oldest in that team, make others move!

Others, however, believe that Target pays well; within my sample, this is only found among workers in secondary labor-market positions. A first-year cashier in her early 20s states that "they actually pay really good. I get paid \$9.50; I found that really mind-blowing when I first came here because I know minimum wage is \$7.25. I feel really comfortable—they pay me great and I just love my job." "It's not bad," says first-year sales-floor worker at a different store, "we get paid \$9.50 and hour, it's every two weeks, it's really decent." And a first-year sales-floor worker, when asked whether her pay at Target is "decent" responds

Yeah, compared to a lot of other retail. I get \$9.50 per hour which is pretty good compared to the \$7.25 that most other people get—like I'm sure they get paid \$7.25 in here [a McDonald's café] and when I worked at [a non-union] Macy's I only got \$7.25.

These three individuals—and all others who found the pay "great," "fair," or "decent"—were in their 20s and lived with their parents.

Target workers, more than those at Macy's, faulted customer antagonism. "Some customers are really mean," states a one-year sales-floor worker, "yeah really really mean—and worse if you are new." "Customers?" asks a first-year cashier rhetorically, "Oh my God, that is

the hardest part about the work. It's not the employees or the employer or something, it's not like that, but the customers." "How do you like working at Target?" I ask a one-year sales-floor specialist. "I hate it! I don't like anything, I don't like it! It's too stressful."

Q: Because there is a lot going on? Or what stresses you out?

A: The guests, doing the same thing over and over. You know, you just do something that you don't like over and over and over again? I hate it. It's not what I want to do with my life. So I'm tired of it.

And according to the seven-year sales-floor worker, "sometimes you have guests that there is no way to make them happy. Those are the customers that are really difficult—'I want this!' and 'I want that!' If a guest hits you, you call AP [Asset Protection], you cannot strike back or you get fired." There were of course those who found customer interaction pleasant, like the first-year cashier in her 20s who is "going into education, so I love to just interact with people, so I find Target is a good place," or the first-year sales-floor worker who finds that "the customers are different, way more respectful" than "at McDonald's [where] I used to work." But these claims were less common than among Macy's workers and rarely cited as a source of pride in one's work.

Finally, monotony and boredom were frequent complaints from Target workers, particularly among cashiers. A first-year cashier who had previously worked on the sales floor at a Target store in Alabama finds that "it's kind of stressful, I don't really like it because it's just like 'beep, beep, beep' all day. That's pretty much all I do: stand there and check stuff all day long. I hate it." When I ask a four-year sales-floor worker whether his job his repetitive, he laughs out loud: "Oh yeah, very repetitive! Tedious, yeah." And a one-year in-stock worker states that

It doesn't change, it's basically the same thing every day. Come, pull merchandise, stock the shelves, and sometimes maybe the overnight team comes in and we help them but it's

basically the same thing, the same thing every day. So you might find it boring when you come in like, ‘oh, I don’t want to work, I would just like to come in every other day.’

Expressions of this sort were prevalent in my discussions with Target workers. But the flip side of boredom is predictability, which some find comforting. “I tell myself sometimes ‘I’m tired of doing this,’” says a three-year male stock worker, “but you just have to ignore it and focus on the good. Once I’m at Target I’m usually in a good mood, I don’t really have bad days.” “It’s a simple job,” states a first-year sales-floor worker, “it’s kind of relaxing.” A one-year cashier who was generally dissatisfied with his position had heard from his colleagues that “Macy’s pays low and they have a pressure to get the guests, but for Target cashier is easy, you just get this number and you take care of the guest.” A one-year specialist “look[s] forward to coming here because I know that when I come in I have one task: make sure everything looks brand. You already know what you are going to do, no surprises.”

Target’s welfarism and team-building efforts, however, appeared to have the intended effect of endearing at least some employees to the company. “There is an open-door policy,” says a two-year sales-floor worker from the electronics department, “we can all get along, we are all friends—that is one thing I really like about Target.” A one-year sales-floor worker from a different store finds that “everybody is friendly, you come here, do what you gotta do and then you get recognition—it’s just a good environment.” Above I quoted the positive views of the three-year food server on the stores’ “appreciation days” that typically include food, and even the seven-year sales-floor worker who raises numerous complaints about the company and her work environment states that

They buy us pizza and hot food and for the 4th of July we have a barbecue. They do the same thing for Black Friday, they bring hot food. It’s not the worst place to work, I’ve seen worse, really worse. It’s not that bad to work here.

In sum, Macy's workers are generally more dissatisfied than their Target counterparts and three sources of this discrepancy are the lower starting wages, longer tenures and more often primary labor-market positions, and the greater effectiveness of Target's welfare and team-building efforts than Macy's haphazard attempts in the same direction. None of this is to suggest that either group of workers is uniformly unhappy or pleased—on the contrary, both groups expressed myriad sources of dissatisfaction and pleasure on the job, with the extent and quality of interpersonal interaction (coworker and customer-directed) being a frequent source of the latter. Among the most common reasons for dissatisfaction at both stores, however, were low pay, expensive or absent benefits and insecurity of employment or lack of full-time hours which, when combined, make a sustainable, independent existence on a Target *or* a Macy's income near impossible in New York City. In the next section, I will show how these same factors work to mitigate occupational identity, though it remains remarkably strong among Macy's workers.

Occupational Identity

Workers' identity with their occupation or craft has long been cited as a leading source of collectivist attitudes and union formation, particularly along *craft* as opposed to *industrial* lines (Brody 1964; Preis 1964; Montgomery 1979; Cobble 1991). In general, identity with one's work can be seen as an element of class consciousness insofar as it engenders recognition of value creation (or in the case of retail, realization) and hence, working class identity. Kielhofner formally defines occupational identity as a seven-part concept consisting of

- One's sense of capacity and effectiveness for doing
- What things one finds interesting and satisfying to do
- Who one is, as defined by one's roles and relationships
- What one feels obligated to do and holds as important
- A sense of the familiar routines of life

- Perceptions of one's environment and what it supports and expects (2002, 106)

Of those I interviewed at Macy's and Target, few "defined" themselves as retail salespersons or openly expressed feelings of "obligation" to be one. In the majority of cases, the reasons for this were low wages and the low social status typically ascribed to such occupations.

But many workers, particularly from Macy's, expressed pride in their work: their interpersonal ability, their product knowledge, even their familiarity with organizational norms to the extent that some claimed to have "trained" their managers. Expressions such as these, in which workers evinced emotional ties and commitment to their jobs, were counted as forms of occupational identity. Within the Macy's sample, 17 out of 29 frontline workers (59 percent) expressed more views of this sort than of apathy or antipathy; within the Target sample only 5 out of 31 frontline workers (16 percent) similarly identified with their jobs. While some of this discrepancy is explained by the shorter tenures and secondary labor-market positions of many Target workers, several secondary-earning Macy's workers *did* identify with their jobs while several primary-earning Target workers *did not*. Let us explore workers' expressions of identity and apathy—and their reasons—in greater detail.

At Macy's the majority of interviewees identified with their work. A four-year associate in her late 40s states "I'm really good at what I do: I make my goals, I make my credits, I interact with customers, because that's naturally me, it's nothing I have to work at because it's really me and I find that cool." A first-year associate in his early 20s finds that "retail helps your people skills and I think that helps you inside for who you are, because it doesn't make you a selfish person, it makes you help people, because it's retail." "I started out in the bakery [of another store] and I just fell in love with retail," says a two-year associate in her early 50s, "I like working with people, I love Macy's, I love Herald Square, I love the tourists, I love the

merchandise, it's never boring." (Later she also states: "This is the first time I've ever been in a union, but I like being in it and I think it's good"). A one-year associate in his mid-20s who is also a DJ has "been working in retail since I was 18," including at other large chains such as Circuit City, Best Buy and Staples. "I have done a lot of retail," he says, but when asked whether he plans to stay in the trade long-term his reply is more ambiguous:

It depends. I mean, there's a guy who works in my store [department] as an actor and he's approaching 30 and the only reason he deals with it [retail] is because of the flexibility that you don't get with an office job. So for a lot of artists and people who are really starving for something else, I think retail complements those kinds of people.

Among older, long-term Macy's workers who had fewer prospects of alternate career paths than their younger coworkers, occupational identity was consistently high. "It's been rewarding for me helping a lot of people here," says a two-year specialist in her early 60s, "it's a really good feeling." But these same workers were also quick to voice complaints about management, working conditions and pay: "I never want to see another retail job again in my life," states the same two-year specialist, "not in this lifetime. I'm waiting until I get my Social Security and I'm gonna run!" A four-year associate in her early 40s finds that although she "didn't train, however as you into working retail you would like to see different aspects of it. For me yes, I could see it as a life going on, but not as something I want to do for the rest of my life." And a ten-year specialist states that she and her coworkers "have one common goal, which is satisfying customers. You feel good satisfying customers, when they leave the store knowing that they got what they wanted."

Many of the younger, shorter-term workers at Macy's, however, had little attachment to their jobs. A two-year support worker advises "if you're looking to get into this field don't look into making it a career. A lot of people don't work in retail long-term, like this is pretty much—you didn't go to school for this." When I ask a first-year cosmetics associate whether she would

like to work in retail as a career, she responds, “no no, definitely not. It’s more of like a college thing. I’m in college now and I need some money, ok. But it doesn’t pay, like I can’t do that forever.” Her coworker, a first-year commissioned associate in the same department, states “I’m just working for Metro card money because I go to school and stuff. I want to go into my field; I don’t want to be doing this.” Both of these women, however, see their work at Macy’s as either part of a career trajectory, in the case of the first who believes “it’s a good experience for when I actually go to beauty school,” or as partial self-fulfillment, in the case of the second: “we [coworkers and customers] like cosmetics; before I came to Macy’s I knew a lot about the products. We all share the same passion.” But another female associate in her early 20s, although she studied fashion design in college, sees little connection between her current sales job and her future plans or self-identity:

Q: Did that [former studies] have anything to do with you coming to work at Macy’s? Being interested in fashion?

A: No. I graduated in July and I really don’t want to do design anymore. I don’t know what I want to with my life so I just took some time off and I needed work to support myself. So I just got the first job that hired me.

But at Macy’s, unlike at Target, several short-term primary and secondary workers developed pride in and identification with their jobs over the course of their tenure. A three-year commissioned associate in men’s suits who holds a bachelor’s degree in engineering describes his purposeful acquisition of product knowledge:

I didn’t know anything about suits when I first started working there, so I had to learn everything. Now that I know the whole floor, when the suits come in I take a look at them, take a look at the material they are made of, how they fit, because you want to know how to explain it to customers. Not everybody does this though, some salespeople just stick to their area, [but] I try to know the whole suit area.

Though he does not explicitly state it, this worker’s involvement in his job indicates a degree of self-investment beyond what most—and even he—consider necessary for perfunctory

performance of his tasks. An even younger two-year male associate in a different commissioned department (women's shoes) notes

I like challenges so when I first started the job was a challenge. I worked at [a furniture chain store] until I figured ok, now I think I need to go to a real retail job where I deal more with customers, so I learn how to be customer savvy. This job pushed me to that limit because if you don't get a customer to like you, how are you going to sell? I am not going to leave this job until I am completely done with retail. So I'm still here.

And a third commissioned associate, also in men's suits, describes her acquisition of product knowledge and growing respect for sales craft over the course of two years at Macy's:

The only thing I came here with was that I like men's [clothing]. I like to sell to men, they are easier to sell to than women. My background in journalism allows me to learn things [quickly]. Little details like shirt sleeves—I just didn't see it [before]. When I came in [to Macy's] I would have to do a measurement for a gentleman and now I could size you just by looking at you. I would say you are a 38 shirt length, a 32 waist, 32 length.

Her estimate was largely accurate. In Macy's commissioned departments, where salespersons are required to have greater product knowledge and to be more effective sellers than their non-commissioned counterparts, workers appear more intellectually involved in their jobs and thus evince a component of occupational identity, even if their long-term goals remain outside of retail.

At Target, statements of identity or emotional investment were few and far between. Of the five individuals who expressed marked occupational identity, four were long-term primary workers—adults over thirty without college degrees who were supporting themselves (and in three cases also their children) largely on Target wages—and the fifth was a young man employed in the electronics department who hoped to be promoted into management. All others defined themselves and their future plans as something other than being a Target team member.

“I give myself another year,” says a two-year cashier and college student, “and if I stay that long it's gonna be like part time just for extra cash. I couldn't see myself working at Target

as a cashier all my life.” “Where do you see yourself in five years?” I ask a first-year sales-floor team member,

A: Photography, I want to have my own photography business, that’s what I went to school for.

Q: So you don’t want to stay at Target long-term?

A: No, no I don’t. I want to start my own stuff, I don’t want to work for nobody else. I don’t mind working here but some days in my head I say ‘no I am not coming back.’

“In five years?” replies a first-year male stock worker to the same question, “I am not even aiming to be at Target in like the next year. I want to go back to school and study psychology, work on getting my Master’s in that and basically moving my life along.” “So you don’t want to make retail a career?” I ask a one-year sales-floor specialist in her early 20s. Her response is emphatic:

Hell no! Excuse my language—hell no! No no no no no. That’s what they [managers] expect, that you are going to stay here forever, they think that you can’t get any other job nowhere else and you will stay here forever, but no that is not the case.

While most respondents were not as uniformly negative as this woman, the common thread among them was a similar lack of identification with their jobs as anything more than a passing, stop-gap employment. A standard refrain was that working at Target was good—for now—but they did not want to stay there. “To me I see Target as a form of springboard, on that level,” says a one-year stock worker, a recent African immigrant. “If I quit Target,” he continues, “I hit the classroom, I go back to school. Retail is a good place to start life, not to be forever.” “It’s not like I’m saying it’s a bad environment to work in,” says a first-year sales-floor worker, “it’s not bad, it’s great. I’m just saying it’s not my career, so when I’m done with school I’m gonna find a new job.” A first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s associate states that his plans to move on have “nothing to do with managers or pay, it’s just me personally and what goals I see for

myself. I feel like I would just be settling with Target and that is not something I want to settle for.”

Many of those who planned to move on from Target and retail in general—the majority of those interviewed—did cite pay as their ultimate reason. “I would rather work someplace else that pays differently but not at Target, I guess, and not at this pay” (1st-year sales-floor worker). A one-year stock worker states that “it’s not a job where you can make a living, it’s not the way I want to live, it’s a job where you make less than fifteen grand a year.” But the most common reason workers gave for their lack of occupational identity was boredom, monotony and the lack of challenge. “They haven’t really taught me anything new here,” says a first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s associate, “I believe it’s mostly common sense: if you have common sense you can work in retail.” A first-year sales-floor worker from a different store believes

A: A career is something you can enjoy, something that you don’t wake up every morning and think ‘I want to quit’ or you are always looking for something else—that’s what I think of as a job, something you do just to get money.

Q: And what do you think of Target as?

A: Right now it’s a job. It felt like a career at first but right now it feels like a job.

A three-year food server in his mid-thirties states that he has “been cooking since I was twelve” but that these skills are rarely used in his current food-preparation role: “you don’t really have to be a chef to cook this food—it’s hot dogs, it’s easy, things like that, we just put the pizzas in the oven.” A four-year sales-floor worker who pays his own tuition from his Target income says “I get bored real fast, so I don’t want to stay here forever. I look at the managers’ and their jobs are even more boring than us, it’s pretty routine.” And a two-year cashier from the same store finds that “standing all day in the same spot—it’s aggravating. I like to move around and do stuff. Any chance I get I take to do bags or customer service just so I can move around.”

Most categories of work at Target, standardized and simplified as they are in comparison with those at Macy's, provide fewer chances for workers to engage their cognitive abilities, leading to a common symptom of boredom. The few who *do* find ways to engage their attention and identify more with their work are either in the electronics department, which requires greater product knowledge and whose workers are encouraged to sell "attachments," or they express pride in their store-system knowledge: an understanding of the overall operation of the store which they have developed over several years' employment.

The two-year team member from the electronics department states that "I try to acknowledge myself with as much information as I can. I do have customers that come in thinking we are supposed to know everything about our merchandise, so I try to read as much information as I can about it." When I ask what his plans are five years hence he responds, "I will probably [still] be in school. And if I get promoted, yeah probably I will be at Target. I think it is a fun place to work to be honest." The seven-year team member and former garment worker relates a story about her superior customer service skills: "the man was pleased, sometimes you have to go out of your way to please them. But you [also] have to know what you are talking about." And largely based on pride in her interpersonal ability and store-system knowledge, she states "I like what I'm doing, I enjoy what I do. Because if I didn't I would've switched to another department a long time ago. I am not gonna give nobody the satisfaction for me to walk out because I do love this job." A two-year cashier similarly notes pride in her knowledge of how the store works: "most of the time they [managers] leave me in charge of the check lanes because they know that I know the job, I have done it long enough I can do just about everything." She believes this ability should have won her a promotion to team leader by now, "but last year

[when] I applied,” she says, “I never got interviewed for the position. I’m good enough to do it for you but I’m not good enough for the position? That’s the way I look at it.”

Altogether, the large discrepancy between Macy’s and Target workers with regards to occupational identity can in part be traced to demographic and job-tenure differences, but disparity on this score between younger *and* older workers across both stores, respectively, cannot be so explained. The difference here appears due to the more challenging and engaging nature of some Macy’s sales jobs in contrast to the majority of those at Target. When I next consider the second component of working class identity—coworker solidarity—these proportions are shown to be nearly reversed; when combined with the foregoing discussion, these differences display the complexity of what it means to identify as a worker in a service context.

Coworker Solidarity

A formal definition of solidarity is “unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards” (Merriam-Webster 2013). For present purposes I operationalize this as the extent to which workers voice attitudes of affinity and common interest, as opposed to those of competition and hostility, with respect to their colleagues.

When I examined the views of all 60 frontline workers at both stores, categorizing each as predominantly in unity or disunity with his or her coworkers, the following figures emerged: at Macy’s, 13 out of 29 individuals (45 percent) displayed consistent solidarity with their fellow workers; at Target, 22 out of 31 (71 percent). This gap is nearly as large, though in the opposite direction, to the difference found between Macy’s and Target workers in their degrees of

occupational identification. When I explore the reasons for this, three factors stand out: age and ethnic differences, the structure of selling between the two stores and wage and benefit differentials within stores. Macy's workforce is more heterogeneous and its mode of selling more individualized than Target's. Furthermore, the two-tier wage and benefit structure at Macy's—a relic of more generous times before the company's mid-1990s bankruptcy—provides a source of resentment for newer workers against their more experienced colleagues. As will be shown, these structural and demographic differences explain much, though not all, of the disparity in coworker solidarity between the two stores.

“I work in dresses,” says a first-year associate in her early 20s, “and it is mostly older women [who work there] and they are very competitive—I've seen them argue with each other in front of customers loudly.” “Is it competitive?” I ask a two-year commissioned associate about her relationship with coworkers. “It is,” she replies, “people are always watching your numbers. Even with friends, at the end of the day you will fight to pull out those last statistics: when they see yours, ‘now let me see yours.’” A seven-year male associate and shop steward “feel[s] that there's this competition between associates where it's like they gotta get their goal and it's totally killed the morale on the floor, it really has pitted worker against worker.” A three-year commissioned associate in men's suits remarks that he's “gotten into some arguments with workers, mostly on going into their area. Sometimes we argue if people [coworkers] come into our sections, and usually the part-timers do that because they used to not have zones.” “Even if we did go on strike,” says a two-year stock worker about the almost-walkout of 2011, “me personally? I still would've went to work—I've got bills and other things I have to take care of.” When I ask whether he was concerned about the proposed reduction of full-time hours that

motivated the conflict he states “the main people I think it would’ve affected were people who have been here for about fifteen or twenty years, it was to a point where this was all they had.”

Statements such as these that emphasized competition, individualism and a lack of affinity with coworkers were common from Macy’s respondents. The company’s individualized goals system was cited most often as a source of friction. “Part-timers don’t really work with the full-timers,” states a first-year commissioned fragrance associate, “because we have our own separate goals, and if we work with them they are going to get the sale.” “They are fighting now over there,” says the 31-year associate about his department while at a nearby café,

A: She was supposed to be on this side, he was over there, and they didn’t make the goal, so let them ring [up customers], what’s the big deal? But they [managers] do that on purpose, for me and you to fight, that’s what they want.

Q: You mean like a divide and rule tactic?

A: Yeah! Exactly, exactly. And they [the workers] keep saying no, it’s an unfair system, it just doesn’t work.

But another common source of disunity consisted of age and ethnic differences. A first-year specialist in her early 40s states that

Okay, I’m West Indian, but I’m also Indian—I’m from Trinidad. Here are a lot of African Americans, there are a lot of Spanish [Hispanic] people, so you find some of the African-American people don’t speak to the Spanish people, but guess what? I think I’m the middle person—they both talk to me.

A two-year associate in his early 20s finds that “there are some older associates that you can still relate to but the younger ones I have more of a connection with because it’s like texting or talking over Facebook, you can approach them more on a personal level.” When I ask a first-year female support worker in her 20s whether she is in a “similar life position” to that of her coworkers, she responds: “Not a lot of them, not so much. Most of them are already married with kids and I think this is what they do. They go home to their families after work.” And a two-year associate in her 50s, who later states that “there’s definitely a feeling of solidarity among the

workers as opposed to management,” notes her initial exclusion, which she believes derived partly from race:

I’m just a little white [former] cashier from Atlanta. I was a temp at the beginning but I took some hazing, absolutely. And I don’t know whether it was because I was a temp or because I was white or whatever, but all I knew was that I wanted to get their respect because this is a tough crowd. I lived in a cul-de-sac in [suburban] Georgia. I was so white where I lived. To come up here, all I knew was if I wanted to earn respect all I did was work my ass off. And that’s what I did and that’s how I got it. Now they call me sister and I don’t feel I’m treated any differently.

Though comments about racial or ethnic divisions were relatively rare and came only from individuals over forty, reports of age and attendant job-tenure divisions were heard from many workers, old and young alike.

Not all Macy’s respondents displayed a lack of solidarity, however, as indicated by the thirteen individuals who voiced predominantly affinitive views. “Even when Macy’s doesn’t have a supervisor on the floor we still join together and do what we have to,” says a four-year associate in her late-40s, “all I know is whatever is right for the employees I am with because I am an employee.” A one-year specialist in her early 20s finds that in her department, “we have like our own little family. So if I need someone to help me with a Macy’s card or need help making the goal and I do what I need for me then I will help them.” A four-year specialist in his late 20s similarly describes a strategy used to minimize goal-based competition in his department: “In my department if you are working we have a rule that if you make your goal, leave the register and let your colleagues work, let them make their goal.” And a two-year associate in his mid-20s found that the 2011 contract negotiations and pre-strike period engendered feelings of solidarity that were otherwise latent: “everybody was amped, everybody was together, they were like ‘let’s strike!’ Yeah, there was a unity in there.” The two-year associate quoted earlier is also worth recalling: she “definitely [found] a feeling of solidarity” in

her department. But the experience of a seven-year associate and shop steward highlights the contradiction of a unionized workforce that must simultaneously compete on an individual basis to achieve sales goals:

It's not only that I'm competing with the people I have to defend in an investigatory interview with security or HR, or whether there's an abusive situation between them and the manager because I'm the shop steward, but nonetheless I have to compete with them for sales. Because they're a union member, you end up having to help them out so it sort of makes it more difficult when you're trying to help them with an issue, you know?

At Target, as was shown, such individualized competition does not exist, due to the company's use of *store-wide* rather than individual sales goals. Though not the only reason, it is noteworthy that Target respondents, who were exposed to this more collectivized incentive structure, exhibited a markedly higher level of solidarity than their Macy's counterparts.

"Target to me is like one big old family," says a first-year sales-floor worker in her early 20s, "everyone talks and it's not like we only see each other at Target, there are a lot of friendships that Target builds. So we work together, we play together, you know? So it's good." "The best aspect of working at Target," states a three-year specialist in his mid-20s, "is the social atmosphere. I always make new friends there, it is not so excruciating to work there when you got people that are friendly and cool." Another first-year sales-floor worker from a different store says that before she comes to work, "I want to see my coworkers because they are fun. Today [upcoming shift] I will have mad fun because I know two of my coworkers are here—one of them started at three and the other one is coming in at six along with me and we have fun." "You feel like it's friendly and open," remarks a two-year female cashier, "so the teamwork, you actually feel that it's not just like, 'oh I'm part of a team'—you *are* part of the team." And a two-year sales-floor worker in his 20s similarly indicates a level of interdependence with his

departmental team: “We try to get to the point where we can sort of rely on each other day-to-day; I try to do this as fast as I can so that you can do this and things of that nature.”

Expressions of affinity and unity, words like “friend,” “family,” “fun” and the managerial motto “one team, one dream” were regularly used by the majority of Target respondents in describing their relations with fellow workers. The experience of a first-year sales-floor worker and former Macy’s associate perhaps best encapsulates the difference between Macy’s and Target with regard to solidarity:

It’s kind of like one team, one dream type of thing so if one person fails then everybody fails, if one person doesn’t get it done, everybody doesn’t get it [at Target]. They are more like a group, they want everybody to be like a family. In Macy’s they were trying to individualize you, you didn’t get this many cards this month and you didn’t get this many sales this month. At Macy’s it’s more individual, and Target is as a group.

Competition was also regularly minimized by Target workers:

Q: Is there ever competition over getting enough hours?

A: Not really, no. I mean some people might complain that they want more hours, but I don’t think we really fight for hours. (1st-year sales-floor worker)

When I ask a similar question about competition regarding raises and promotions of another first-year sales-floor worker at a different store, he states “nah, we don’t do that. I mean, either way you would get the raise, it just depends on your attendance, your attitude with people in the store, stuff like that.” And a one-year stock-worker in his mid-20s finds

I am not working for myself, I am working for the team—when it is good it is good for all, when it is bad, bad for all. So I don’t see it as competition, but maybe my team leader, I don’t know, maybe he sees it as competition. But if you tell me we are a team then it shouldn’t be a competition.

In his case the impact of Target’s ‘team-based’ ethos on workers’ own perceptions of their coworkers can be observed—namely, that it encourages feelings of solidarity rather than, as the seven-year Macy’s associate put it, “pitt[ing] worker against worker.”

Yet is the intrinsically more collectivized nature of Target's labor process the only cause of increased solidarity among its workers? A closer analysis of the *reasons behind* workers' feelings of affinity—and its still-present converse—point to two salient extrinsic factors: age and ethnicity. “I am 20,” says the first-year sales-floor worker who previously said she “want[s] to see my coworkers” after a shift ends. “There is another coworker who is 20, one is 21, my favorite coworker, she is 23—mostly in their 20s and then 50 and up, but mostly 20s.” “Do you hang out with people outside of work?” I ask her. “Yeah,” she responds, “I hang out with about five of them outside of work but the older ones I won't hang out with.” Another first-year sales-floor worker in her early 20s from a different store finds that “the majority of the younger people—the old people not really—most of the younger ones hang out on their break.” The following exchange with a one-year male stock worker reinforces this point:

Q: How do you get along with the other team members?

A: Yeah it's good, everybody gets along.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: Mostly a lot of young people that work in the back room.

Q: Not a lot of older folks?

A: No, at the most like two—I think there are two.

For those workers who shared a Caribbean background, this was also cited as a source of common feeling. A four-year sales-floor worker, himself a Caribbean immigrant, responds to my question about shared ethnicity as follows:

Q: Do you think that influences the culture of the store at all? Like the dynamic among coworkers?

A: Yeah because people have a common background, some of my managers are American and actually you hear them speaking in the accent of the people, so I guess it influences them in some way. The store itself, if you look at everybody you can really tell who is American and who's not. So yeah, I think there are a lot of Caribbean people who influence this store.

Age and ethnicity, however, could also serve as sources of exclusion and *disunity*, particularly for older workers or those without a Caribbean background. A one-year

specialist in her late-20s, although she is “friendly with them [coworkers], I just like my managers more, maybe because they are more around my age. The coworkers is just like drama, it’s all about drama; drama, drama, drama.” The oldest and longest-tenured Target respondent, a woman in her early 60s, believes that some of her younger coworkers “talk too much, they bring in their cell phones and want to put it under the table where I am [in the fitting room].” “I feel like I’m a very hard worker and I don’t talk too much,” she continues, “and some people do bother me, the other associates, about the re-shop, you know.” And the seven-year team member and former garment worker, whose feelings of exclusion due to her non-Caribbean (Latina) ethnicity were explored in chapter 3, also feels ‘the other’ on the basis of age:

I just want to do my job, go home and every two weeks get my paycheck and pay my bills. But I want to work in peace—I’m not into all this ‘he said/she said,’ ‘did you see what she was wearing?’ No, I am not with that. I am too old for that.

Taken together, the gap between Macy’s and Target workers on the score of solidarity can be traced to differences in the structure of the labor process (individualized vs. collectivized) as well as to aspects of the employment relation, such as pay- and promotion-based incentives. But worker characteristics, specifically age and ethnic identity, also appear to play crucial roles in the construction of collective work identities or the lack thereof. At Target, where larger portions of the workforce are both young and students than at Macy’s, these factors seem to augment the already group-oriented ethos promulgated by management; similar effects, though to a somewhat lesser extent, can be attributed to shared Caribbean identity in two of the three Target stores studied. As the next and final sections make clear, however, solidarity is not identical or even strongly related to feelings of opposition toward managers, management or the corporation at large. It is to an investigation of *this* disparity that I now turn.

Opposition to Management

Opposition can be conceptualized as the degree to which workers see their interests as contrary to (or, for the negative case, in harmony with) those of management. Using this, and again based on a methodical examination of the entirety of each respondent's views, I again find a clear disparity between Macy's and Target workers—in reverse direction to the gap in solidarity but congruent with the differences between each group on satisfaction and occupational identity. Fully two thirds of frontline Macy's respondents (19 out of 29) exhibited predominant attitudes of opposition towards managers and management; in contrast, only slightly more than a third (11 out of 20) of Target workers displayed similar views. Here I delve into the expressions of each set of workers on this score, assessing not only the form and extent of their views, but the reasons they give for them.

Macy's workers display a robust culture of opposition, strengthened by the presence of Local 1-S and the attendant formalized relations between workers and managers. "It's a rarity to find really good managers that you can get along with and work with," says the seven-year associate and shop steward, "most of the time when that happens they tend to move that manager right out of the store." The same individual finds that "the recognition they pretend to give at store rallies in the morning, it's all propaganda. The associates don't buy into it, I feel they don't because they know it's not realistic." Another shop steward at a different store, herself an eight-year associate, notes the deliberate strategies pursued by workers in her department to resist overbearing managers: "We kind of broke down the managers to where they have to respect us. Instead of being confrontational with workers they try to be more understanding." When I ask how this was achieved, she states

We had to force people [coworkers] to write grievances, I wrote so many grievances—if they even looked at me funny I wrote a grievance. As far as I'm concerned, that's a form

of harassment. They [the grievances] were just going to the manager, their manager, and when a manager gets too many grievances then they ship him out of the store to someplace else.

A first-year support worker in a vendor-leased department notes that her vendor representative, the equivalent of a subcontracted supervisor, was constantly calling on her off days. “And I just told her,” she says, “‘don’t call me on my days off. After I leave here, do not call me.’” She got the message. The union rep was like, ‘if she gets annoying, just come to me.’” “The managers don’t really interact too much,” states a three-year commissioned associate, “and I think they tell them not to interact with the sales associates, so we just keep a professional relationship and don’t talk too much.” When I ask a first-year associate to describe the general relationship with managers, she replies “me personally? It’s favorites. I hold no personal relationships with managers because I hold that things should be professional and nothing personal.” She later states: “Macy’s doesn’t really care for your needs because I know if I need a day off to take my daughter somewhere, then they will say, ‘okay, okay,’ then when the day comes around I have to call out and miss a day’s pay. So they don’t care for your needs.” A six-year specialist in his late 20s responds to the same initial question, “management? I don’t speak much with them and I’m not that friendly. We don’t have much in common.” He later describes the relationship in explicit class terms:

Actually, it’s like a class system. I remember I went to one staff party and I went and sat down and observed the managers. They went by themselves, so it was like a peasant class over here and the upper class on that side; the management and the little people. So I noticed that and I didn’t go back, and I encourage people not to participate in that.

And a four-year associate in her late 40s similarly believes that “whoever the big man is” at Macy’s,

All he is doing is sitting behind his desk and just making the rules and passing it down and down. Like dominoes, you know? Everybody’s catching it and catching it and catching it but nobody’s feeling the real weight except for the one at the end. All the

dominoes fall on them. Is that any different from anything else in this world? Probably not, that's how I look at it.

When I ask why she thinks Macy's has such a hierarchy she states "because it's not city-owned. That's why I would like it to be city-owned because you would be more protected just like regular city jobs." In these last two cases, views beyond opposition and congruent with Mann's (1973) notion of "class totality" are clearly evident; the woman's call for public ownership of Macys even constitutes a nascent concept of "alternative society," or at least enterprise-level organization.

Why do so many Macy's respondents exhibit attitudes of opposition? The reasons appear multiple, but can be attributed to intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics alike. With regard to intrinsic causes, managerial control over output at Macy's—the goals system—is a central source antagonism. "Their tactics when their numbers are down," states an eleven-year associate, "let's just say is not to be desired for. You shouldn't have to be penalized or made to feel discouraged or threatened—that doesn't help your outcome." The 31-year associate faults it as "an unfair system," a two-year associate believes "they need to get rid of it" and another two-year associate states that because of the goals system, "we feel like no matter how hard you work, it ain't good enough." On the extrinsic front, low pay and managers' often adversarial style are cited: "to me, honestly?" says a four-year male specialist, "I learned that we are just a number, we are not a person, it doesn't matter how hard I work. And I really hate that word, 'appreciate,' 'I appreciate that'—it's a fake thing." "Their stock is doing great," says the 31-year associate of the company's financial health, "I wish we could take that money out [laughs]. They are just greedy, it's just gimme, gimme, gimme." And a two-year support worker states

One big thing I want to tell you is that they are spending \$400 million redesigning Macy's [Herald Square store], so this company is doing very well.⁶⁴ They don't want to give you a good raise, they don't want to give you more money, but if you walk in here on winter, summer, all of those four seasons, you will see decorations.

But the additional extrinsic aspects of job tenure and unionization, as well as age, are also prominent sources of opposition. Expressions of conflict with management are more common and more pronounced the longer tenured and—typically in tandem—the older workers are. In the cases described above, the presence and activity of Local 1-S were cited several times as a counter-weight to managerial transgressions and one that reinforces workers' sense of interest conflict: "I have so many complaints about different things in here," relates a two-year commissioned associate, "I think the union lady is tired of hearing it from my mouth." And though no respondents cited their own age or time on the job as reasons for opposition (or lack thereof), simple figures support this: of the twelve respondents over the age of thirty, ten displayed marked opposition; of the seventeen that were under thirty, only nine were so opposed. The voices of those who were either neutral to or collegial with managers thus came overwhelmingly from younger workers: "Our managers are like our guide," states a first-year associate in his early 20s, "so if we show them that we do our job then we are opening doors." "It's pretty good," says another first-year, early-20s associate about her relations with managers, "it's pretty casual and friendly, I don't really have complaints." But a two-year associate in his mid-20s, who has "certain managers I go to because I know they work" and others he avoids because "they either forget to put in a personal day or forget to fill out some form" finds that "one of the best managers in my department used to be an associate."

⁶⁴ According to Macy's own 2012 annual report, this is indeed the exact figure: "In early 2012, we began one of the largest capital investments in the history of our company — the top-to-bottom renovation of Macy's Herald Square flagship store in New York City. This four-year, \$400 million reinvention will make Herald Square the world's most exciting, interesting and technologically advanced department store" (2012b, 4).

At Target, the level and extent of opposition are almost exactly reversed. When I ask a two-year sales-floor worker from the electronics department whether he feels workers and managers are on the same team or not, he responds:

I mean, me with my manager, I am pretty cool with him. I joke around with him, he jokes around with me. Maybe not everybody feels like that but I am pretty good with my manager. No, I don't feel like there is any separation.

A first-year sales-floor worker at a different store states that “the thing I like about it is they have this open-door policy. The man in charge of the whole Target [store] his name is [Mike] and we can talk to him about anything. I think Target is a good place.” When I ask another first-year sales-floor worker at yet a third store whether she feels her interests are the same as those of managers, she replies: “most of the time, yeah, yeah. Because, actually Target cares about their workers—they have us take this ‘best team’ survey every couple of months.” Comparing her experiences at Target with those at Macy's, where she previously worked, she states

Actually I think Target is better than Macy's because Macy's didn't really recognize you for the work that you do. Like they give you Macy's money here and there but you have to be like great, now I have to buy something or hit the raffle or something. At Target they have these great team member cards that we can write for each other and team leads.

When asked whether he feels that he and his managers are on the same team, another first-year sales-floor worker replies “yes I feel like that; everybody's cool.” The three-year food server who said in chapter 3 that his Target managers were “the nicest bosses I've ever had” describes the general dynamic with management in his department as “a good relationship. You might come to work and someone's talking about the basketball game that happened last night—it's not like ‘you can't talk to me’ or anything like that.” “Management is good,” says an eleven-year sales-floor worker, “they are good, they are nice.” And yet another first-year sales-floor worker from the same store describes her relationship with supervisors in similarly positive terms:

Our boss is fun, our managers are all fun, I joke around with our managers all the time. I think they like to raise our spirits, to make sure we're happy, to make sure we're doing what we have to do and not be angry all day. They are basically looking out for you, that's what I think.

Attitudes of the above-quoted sort, which predominate among Target respondents, are the opposite of opposition: they display harmony, fellow feeling, even a sense of *solidarity* with management, or at least individual managers. And this is in line with what Target wants to achieve: a team-based workplace in which the 'team' includes not only frontline staff, but first-, second- and higher-tiered supervisors. The aspects of welfarism used by the company—its open-door policy, in-store counselors, free food provision, huddles and “recognition”—appear to help inculcate the desired bond between workers and managers. When I ask the first-year team member who had previously worked at Macy's whether she feels she and her colleagues “contribute in an important way to the functioning of the store” she replies, “oh yeah, yes, very much. And I think Target recognizes that more than Macy's. Actually last week we did really good for the month so they gave us Chinese food for the whole store, both overnight and dayside.” A first-year cashier at a different store, who finds Target managers to be “very open people, they are nice,” indicates one of her reasons for thinking this as the in-store counseling Target provides: “if you have any kind of trouble, any kind of problem they can help you in your department—if you need legal assistance there is also help that the team leaders can give you.” And a one-year sales-floor worker who finds managers to be “like basically our coworkers, we all have good relationships with the people who are higher than us” attributes this to frontline workers' inclusion in departmental planning during huddles: “we actually get a breakdown, we get a perspective of what's going to happen on that very day.” When I ask whether this was also the case at his previous retail job, he states, “well, at [clothing chain] we got our sales target and

everything but it's just not Target, that's all; it's just not Target. There is no other way of putting it: it's just not Target.”

The predominant characteristic of Target workers is thus a lack of opposition to and in many cases a sense of unity with management. But feelings of this sort are by no means uniform across the workforce. The seven-year sales-floor-worker finds that

Target is like manipulative. If you have something to say [about your team leader] you don't spread it around, you go over to the office and say 'I disagree with this and this.' If they don't listen the second time a lot of people call corporate, the big office in Minnesota.

With regard to her immediate supervisor, “I don't trust her,” she says, “if I have a problem I go to my big boss, I go to my exec.” A one-year specialist who is African American notes that “certain [managers] will talk to you in a way that is not polite, like never worked a day in their life and they don't know how to talk to people.” She then attributes this to “some of them [being] from California,” which may imply racial differences, though she does not state this directly.

And a first-year stock worker, when asked to describe the relationship between workers and managers says

It's not friendly, I wouldn't say it's friendly. The model of the store is fast, fun and friendly—that's the rule that we go by. But the whole friendly situation doesn't work out that well. Fast and fun? It's not always fun. We have a lot of bad experiences because my exec, he is a pain, nobody can stand him, we would love for him to leave.

I ask him why he thinks this antagonism exists, despite the fact that many of his sales-floor colleagues note the opposite. He states,

The stock room is behind closed doors. We say some of the filthiest things to each other, cursing and yelling. Sometimes we do it and it is joking around, it is perfectly fine, but when you are trying to enforce your authority on another individual, you have to really choose your words carefully and the tone you use to talk to them because it doesn't work out too well [when the supervisor does this].

Though the attitudes of both Macy's and Target workers toward management are by no means uniformly oppositional or harmonious, clear patterns of *predominant opposition* and *predominant collaboration* are evident at each firm, respectively. At Macy's the sources of conflict are the recent speed-up of the goals system, low wages and the formal, unionized relationship between the two camps. In contrast, Target's extensive use of participatory management techniques, combined with union absence and a generally younger and more secondary workforce appear to explain much of the vertical solidarity found between its workers and managers. When I examine the final category, union receptivity, I will show that the gap in opposition between the two groups of workers closely parallels that found in pro-union attitudes, which also parallel workers' feelings of dissatisfaction at each company.

Union Receptivity

In this section I consider directly one of the central questions of this study: to what extent and under what circumstances are service workers open to unionization? At Macy's this is not an abstract question: there already *is* a union in the workplace, one which has been there longer than any current worker and has evolved a complex contractual relationship with management. The questions before Macy's workers are then, to what extent is their experience with *this* union positive or negative? Are there any criticisms they would raise? And how does their experience with Local 1-S inform their views about unions and class-based organizations in general? At Target, the question of unionism is abstract: it is not about this or that particular organization already present in the workplace, but rather the idea of workers being represented by their own, independent organization—a concept that was unfamiliar to and required some explanation for several younger Target respondents. Much like worker's oppositional views, where I found a 66

– 35 percent spread between Macy’s and Target respectively, predominantly pro-union attitudes are found among 59 percent of Macy’s and 35 percent of Target workers. On this basic measure, Macy’s workers are thus more ‘pro-union’ than their Target counterparts, but several of them raise criticisms of Local 1-S, just as at Target a non-negligible number of respondents not only understand what unions were, but would adamantly prefer to have one in their workplace.

Most Macy’s workers have a positive opinion of Local 1-S. This is true particularly of older and longer-tenured workers, but also of many younger, recently-hired associates. “With the union there is job security,” says a two-year support worker in his early 20s, “they can’t fire you unless you are doing something unethical. They look out for you, that’s why you have to pay [dues].” “I like the union,” he continues, and when I ask him if he would take part in a hypothetical strike the following week, he states, without hesitation, “yeah I would take part in it, since I work with [i.e. as a member of] the union, I would take part.” A first-year commissioned associate in her early 20s finds that “the union does hold a lot of power”; when asked if her experience with it has been positive or negative, she states “if you have any little issue you can always go to the union, they are always there to help you.” She then relates an episode of disagreement with her supervisor over scheduling: “So I ended up going to the union and she called them and they changed it [the schedule] within seconds.” “I’ve never been in a union,” says a two-year associate in her 50s about her previous work experience, “but I’m glad we have a union card because the workers here they have protection and I’ve heard of situations where the union goes to bat for them. From what I’ve seen they’re doing their job.” A two-year associate in his mid-20s notes that “this is my first union experience.” When I ask him how it has been for him, he responds “it’s pretty cool. Yeah, it’s nice to have somebody on your back.” Another two-

year associate from the same store, commissioned and in her 40s but who has “never been in a unionized system before,” finds that

After the strike, the psychology changed in terms of the dynamic between manager and worker. I mean I felt that we were untouchable. The energy to me—I could tell managers kind of backed off. They were no longer as abrasive; there was a definite line drawn.

“It makes sense,” says a one-year associate in his early 20s about the union, “because it really gets your back. There’s been several issues where people went on strike as the union and the union has your back in a lot of stuff.”⁶⁵

Most Macy’s respondents had similarly positive impressions of Local 1-S. Wages, however, were almost never the reason; instead, “protection,” “having your back” and “security” were the most common reasons why workers liked having a union. But of the 29 frontline workers interviewed, eleven were also predominantly anti-union or completely ambivalent. And among those who were pro-union, several raised serious critiques of the methods and actions of Local 1-S. I consider both groups in turn.

The six-year specialist in his late 20s who previously described worker-manager relations in terms of “peasant” and “upper” classes has almost equal criticism for the union:

Union experience? Useless, helpless, I don’t know. The union they think is Macy’s, Macy’s has more persuasive power than the union—they’re both useless. The only time they’ll step in is when there are people they are trying to fire, otherwise they are just collecting [dues]. And whatever policy the union favors tends to work better with the older people.

A first-year specialist and immigrant from Trinidad in her 40s finds that, “from my experience even back home unions, while you are with them they don’t stick with the employees’ interest; they tend to settle.” When I ask her more specifically about Local 1-S, she states “recently they did have a union negotiation and I think only employees who have been here a certain number of

⁶⁵ New York Macy’s workers have not officially gone on strike since 1972; what he is referring to are likely the short hour-long stoppages and rallies held by Local 1-S during the 2011 contract negotiations.

years will get an increase.” With managers, she prefers to go it alone: “I came in, I worked hard, the manager recognized me and I’m just—it works for me.” And a four-year specialist in his late 20s, who believed the union should have gone on strike in June 2011—“you need to sacrifice; if you don’t sacrifice you can’t get nothing”—now says “I don’t care about the union because if the company doesn’t want me the union can’t do nothing.” “This layer,” he states about long-term Macy’s workers, among which he does not count himself, “for them it [the union] is good, but not for us. With the new contract, new hires will not get any benefits, and they agreed with that. So that’s why I’m just done with this union.”

Similar views are common among predominantly anti-union individuals: they often cite their own ability and work ethic as reasons why they ‘don’t need’ a union and many fault Local 1-S for tacitly accepting wage and benefit divisions between older and newer workers. But several pro-union individuals take issue with the structure and tactics of Local 1-S. “I think we should’ve had a strike,” says an eight-year associate and shop steward, “I think they sold us out. We got a 65-cent raise the first year, so they screwed us, they knew we wanted a dollar.” With regard to the goals and new scheduling systems, a seven-year associate and shop steward states

I don’t think the union has put up enough resistance. We have put up resistance in shop steward meetings but I think there’s that component where the union has to allow Macy’s to run their business. I always say the union is not perfect but the company is not perfect.

And the four-year associate who favors Macy’s being “city-owned” asks with regard to the newly scheduling system, “what are they here for? Are they fighting for us or not? Every time you tell the union something they agree with you but then they do the opposite and I’m not the only person that recognizes this.” While the views of truly anti-union workers can be largely understood through the lens of Lopez’s “working class anti-unionism,” (2004, 29) those of this

second group appear rather as latent analogues to the sentiments of the 1970s “rebel rank-and-file” workers discussed at length by Brenner (2010) and Cowie (2010).

At Target the situation is drastically different. While a few respondents were adamantly anti-union—they knew what unions were and did *not* want one in their workplace—the majority of those whose views were not “pro-union” seemed simply unaware or unfamiliar with the concept and purpose of worker organizations. The response of a two-year cashier when asked whether she had any previous union experience or had ever heard her coworkers talk about them, is simply “no.” “Are you familiar with the concept of unions?” I then ask. “No,” she replies, “I don’t know how that works.” A first-year male cashier at a different store says “I mean, I don’t know how the union works, I don’t have any idea about the union so I don’t know how could they help me or how can I help them.” A first-year sales-floor worker in her early 20s mistakenly responds to my general question about unions with “I believe they [Target] have one but most people aren’t in it.” Another first-year sales-floor worker in his early 20s states “I really don’t know anything about the union; if they have one I don’t know about it”; a first-year cashier says she “do[es]n’t know much about unions”; and a one-year sales-floor worker in his mid-20s, when asked, “What do you think about the issue of unions?” emphatically replies

I don’t care about it, I don’t know about it, I don’t involve myself with it. When it comes to that I have a job, if they give me a little more information about it I will talk about it but right now I don’t really care for it. It’s never really been brought up to me, so it’s not my business.

The majority of Target workers who were not pro-union (20 out of 31 respondents) appeared to be so for similar reasons: they simply had no experience or familiarity with unions and consequently, little idea of how such an organization, if present, could affect their working life. Others, however, were more pointedly anti-union. A one-year sales-floor specialist who voiced strong dissatisfaction and management opposition was also strong on not liking unions:

“[clothing chain] was a union store,” she says about her previous workplace, “and that was the worst! The break room was bad, we had a little table and it was shaky, the refrigerator didn’t work half the time. It was really bad, I didn’t like it.” I then ask whether she feels a union “would be helpful in terms of improving things here [at Target]?” “Nope” is her response. An eleven-year sales-floor worker who described previous organizing efforts at her store and threats from management that “anybody that agreed with it would get fired,” responded as follows when asked how she would feel about the store being unionized: “no, we don’t need one here, everybody would go out on strike. We have a health insurance, we have dental and all that.”⁶⁶ A two-year sales-floor worker in his 20s says “I have a family member that is a union member, but I myself don’t have a particular interest in unions. I understand what they are and what they represent but never had that interest. I’m more of a person that would rather manage.” And a first-year sales-floor worker who previously worked at a unionized Macy’s and states “I don’t think there is really a difference” also believes the following about a potential union at Target: “I don’t really think it would make things better. Target already has this balance—it probably would [make a difference] for some people but I don’t think it would make a difference.”

In some cases, workers’ apathy or antipathy towards unions was due to past experiences with ineffective unions in other workplaces. In a larger number of cases, younger respondents were simply unaware of potential union benefits. But in several cases, workers’ anti-union attitudes appeared as the direct results of Target’s anti-union propaganda. A first-year stock worker who was both dissatisfied and opposed to Target managers, stated that a few months before we spoke, “they [managers] would speak to us individually, they would pick out certain people and talk to us about joining the union.” The impression they gave, he says, was that “if you want to join the union by all means go ahead, we don’t care. But after the discussion most of

⁶⁶ According to her own statements, however, she receives these benefits through Medicaid, not Target

us were basically like all ‘no’ for the union.” When I asked whether this was his own view, he stated, “yes, no one wants to join the union really.” A one-year stock worker from a different store, who checked to be sure I was not a union organizer before agreeing to be interviewed, said “if they [union organizers] come by I’m not signing it because I don’t want to be part of it.” I ask why, and this was his response:

Because of what they [managers] said, that the union doesn’t keep promises. Oh you will get more hours, more vacation time and stuff like that, they will tell you things like that but when you contact them they won’t pick up the phone and stuff like that, so it’s not a good idea.

This individual had never worked in a unionized environment, had no family or friends who were union members and when asked whether he’d ever been contacted by a union organizer stated “no, no”.

Despite the pervasiveness and effectiveness of Target’s dissuasion efforts among some workers, more than a third of those interviewed clearly wanted a union and thought it would improve working life at Target. “How do you feel about unions?” I ask a four-year sales-floor worker,

Personally I think there should be because some of the things that have happened, it’s kind of unfair. Like with the pay: I look at other stores and they don’t do half the stuff we do and they get paid more. I think if there was a union we would probably be getting paid more. They should assign somebody personally to do garbage—sometimes they will assign us to do garbage and we don’t have gloves or anything and we risk being infected. It’s not a lot, but I think there are some areas where there should be a union to kind of help us out.

According to a first-year sales-floor worker, if there were a union at her Target store, “I think it would be more fair. Some things are not fair, like we usually don’t get the shifts that we want.”

A two-year cashier states that “we could have actually used the union when we had a hurricane [in August 2011].” She then lists a series of scheduling problems that occurred at that time. “And a union would make that different?” I ask. “I think so!” she replies, “because the union is

supposed to do what? Fight for the people that work for the company!” The seven-year team member and former garment worker describes what she sees as the impact of the company’s prevention efforts: “when they gave us classes on the union they make it look like very ugly, so that people who have never been to a job with a union—you know? I’ve been in jobs with unions,” she asserts, “and the reason they [Target managers] don’t want a union is because that cutting hours, that favoritism? Will stop. That’s why they don’t want a union. I am in favor of the union, but nobody else is.” While Target’s anti-union program has indeed turned the opinion of some workers against unions, the positive views of others indicate that she is at least partly mistaken in her final claim.

Comparing workers’ union receptivity at Macy’s and Target is different from comparing their views on more abstract categories such as satisfaction, solidarity or occupational identity. For Macy’s workers, the question of unionism is concrete: it is already part of their daily experience and most workers’ attitudes are an immediate reflection of this, both positive and negative; for Target workers, the question is more general but at the same time influenced by the company’s very specific anti-union offensive. In sum, Macy’s workers are more pro-union than their Target counterparts and a common reason for this—despite complaints—is their positive experience with Local 1-S. Target workers, for their part, are more often ambivalent or consciously anti-union—in some cases due to youth and lack of familiarity, in others because of negative prior experience, and in yet others because of the company’s deliberate dissuasion efforts.

Summary

This chapter has explored five key dimensions of class consciousness among Macy's and Target workers. On four out of five dimensions—satisfaction, occupational identity, management opposition and union receptivity—Macy's workers were more class conscious than their Target counterparts. I traced these differences to the less simplified structure of work and the more authoritarian managerial style of Macy's, though direct control, pay and job security were found to account for much less of the variance in class consciousness than initially expected. Coworker solidarity was a conspicuous outlier on this analysis: it was the only element of class consciousness which Target workers displayed markedly more of than Macy's workers. This was largely attributed to the more collectivized nature of Target's selling process, the 'team' ethos encouraged by its more 'collaborative' managers and the more youthful—and in two stores more ethnically homogeneous—demographics of Target workers. But solidarity was also found to vary in an opposite direction to all other aspects of class consciousness, regardless of workplace or demographic correlates, while dissatisfaction and opposition were relatively closely related and often shared common sources. These findings point to ambiguities among the elements and inconsistencies in the sources of workplace-based class consciousness that deserve further attention.

In sum, workers at unionized Macy's are more class conscious and supportive of unionization than those at non-union Target. A sizeable minority (35 percent) of Target workers, however, display open preferences for unionization and even among those who don't, the large majority display feelings of common interest—solidarity—with their fellow workers, a situation which is often an advantage unionization efforts. In the next chapter, I examine one organization's concrete implementation of three organizing strategies designed to utilize and

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develop such latent sources of identity and collective action among other, though not entirely dissimilar groups of New York City retail workers.

Chapter 6. Organizing or Advocacy? The Case of the Retail Action Project

On an overcast February afternoon I enter a nondescript office building in midtown Manhattan, head to the fifth floor and into a large room. The far wall has a plaque fixed to it with “RWDSU”⁶⁷ projecting out in silver letters. Below this stands Alicia Canary,⁶⁸ middle-aged, speaking animatedly to a crowd of about twenty-five. The Retail Action Project’s two-day “customer service training” has just begun. The crowd seated around six tables is predominantly black and Latino, and most look to be less than thirty years old, though a few are older. Alicia explains the purpose of this ten-hour training session, spread out over two days: “We will be helping you develop interview skills, put together resumes and provide you with a better understanding of customer service.” This is what the participants have signed up for: customer service training for retail sales personnel, complete with a certificate at the end.

But just as Alicia, who is a full-time organizer, speaks these words, she turns to introduce a young man, one of RAP’s worker-members.

“How’s everybody doing out there? Good? Great. I’m here to tell you guys about the Retail Action Project, or RAP as we call it. RAP is a member-run, non-profit organization with over 800 members.⁶⁹ At RAP we work to improve retail jobs through organizing, media and policy.” After a short hesitation, he continues: “Even though retail is one of the most profitable industries in the city, we all know about the low wages they pay, the disrespect at the workplace and the crazy shifts we deal with.” Some of the attendees look around at each other, surprised at

⁶⁷ This is the acronym for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, part of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the largest retail union in North America..

⁶⁸ The names of all organizers and union staff are real; those of most members and retail workers have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

⁶⁹ Network membership has since risen to over 2000—see below.

the sudden change of tone. When the young man mentions wages and scheduling though, a number of them nod and one or two laugh.

A young woman seated towards the front raises her hand. She says she always tries to be “straight” with her supervisor and doesn’t let him give her crazy shifts. At this point David Jimenez, a full-time organizer, steps in from the side.

“It is very important to address issues of worker abuse and to raise grievances against them. But it’s even more important that we address these problems *as a group*, and not just individually, because then we have more *power*.”

After this exchange the presenters shift to a discussion of RAP’s various committees, the organizing campaigns it’s been involved in, and its goal of providing a network for skill transfer and job mobility from low-end to high-end industry tiers, and even into wholesaling jobs (which typically pay more than retail). At the mention of skills, a middle-aged man at the center of the room raises his hand.

“There is a lot of skill in what we do,” he says. He talks about how people in his job are often referred to as “unskilled” but argues that, in fact, there’s a lot of patience, “people skills” and knowledge of the product necessary to be an effective salesperson. His comments get approval from the rest of the room and even a few claps.

David steps in again: “We’re going to do some group work now. Each group gets to talk about and answer one of these three questions. One: what challenges do you face with regard to economic and occupational advancement in retail? Two: what challenges are faced in the retail industry by workers? And three: how can we elevate our voices and advance workers’ interests in the retail industry?” After ten minutes of small-group discussion, the class reconvenes to share

their responses. Grievances are many: erratic scheduling, low-pay, “dirty politics by management,” discriminatory hiring practices, and lack of benefits are among the most common.

One type of grievance, however, appears several times, and comes up repeatedly at two similar sessions in the following months: lack of on-the-job training, “no money for training,” and the common practice by managers of “just dumping you into a job and expecting you to figure it out.” A young woman describes starting at the GAP and being promised a one-week “apprenticeship” with her supervisor. The supervisor gave this up after two days and left her to “figure it out”. An older man states that even though he’s worked in retail for over twelve years, he can’t advance because he “needs more training within the industry.” And a younger man, clearly frustrated, tells of a manager’s response to his question about a sales display: “he told me, ‘stay in your place as a salesperson and don’t ask questions’—and then he hired his stupid-ass nephew a week later.”

The Dilemma of Retail Organizing

Training sessions such as these are a primary way for RAP to engage unorganized retail workers. Through online postings and targeted store outreach, the organization promotes its free events in pragmatic terms: as a means of improving one’s resume and networking to find jobs. Once inside, however, attendees become subjects in a consciousness-raising effort—what might be called “*conscientização*,” to use Freire’s term (1970, 67). The combination of service provision and consciousness-raising, in line with the organization’s stated aim of “improv[ing] retail jobs through organizing, media, policy and creative action,” places RAP squarely in the framework of worker centers that have proliferated in recent years (RAP website; Fine 2006, 2).

But several points distinguish RAP from the majority of worker centers. Of the 137 that existed in the U.S. in 2005—of which RAP was not yet one—the vast majority (122) were specifically oriented toward immigrant workers (Fine 2006, 3). Eighty-six percent originated from non-union organizations (such as ethnic NGOs, legal service or faith-based organizations) and 85 percent maintained no or only occasional contact with traditional unions (*ibid*, 15, 121). And of the 56 percent that targeted specific industries, none of these went after retail (*ibid*, 23). RAP is thus among the small minority of union-seeded, non-ethnic-specific worker centers. As of 2012, it is one of only two such centers focused on retail.⁷⁰

RAP arose in the context of declining union membership for U.S. retail workers, along with falling wages, weakening job security and increasingly erratic scheduling. By 2011, just 4.9 percent of the nation's retail workers were union members, down from 8.6 percent in 1983 (Hirsch and Macpherson 2012). Between 1990 and 2008, mean hourly earnings for nonsupervisory retail workers grew just 1.9 percent, from \$12.63 to \$12.88 in inflation adjusted dollars—against the backdrop of an 80 percent increase in per-hour productivity (US BLS, Current Employment Statistics, Labor Productivity and Costs). In popular media discourse, from Janeane Garofalo's GAP-worker character in *Reality Bites* to the depiction of Walmart work as the epitome of downward mobility in *Fun with Dick and Jane*—not to mention Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) first-hand account of same—retail has become synonymous with low-wage, unstable, “stopgap” work (Tannock 2001). Yet the prospect of raising wages and workplace standards through renewed unionization or some other form of organizing is, at best, distant.

Myriad attempts to organize on a store-by-store basis through NLRB elections have failed, often due to intense employer opposition (see Becker, forthcoming). Where successful, as

⁷⁰ The other is the 2011-instituted Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart), a national non-profit organization sponsored by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and exclusively oriented toward Walmart workers.

at Walmarts in Palestine, Texas and Jonquière, Quebec, employers have displayed their ability to “cauterize the wound” by closing down unionized departments or entire stores (Lichtenstein 2009, 137). Growing recognition of the challenges of the single-workplace model of NLRB-sanctioned organizing motivated the RWDSU’s support of RAP’s formation, in collaboration with the community-based organization Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), as an independent worker center.

Calls for unions to break out of the workplace model and pursue alternative modes of organizing have become increasingly urgent since the 1980s, in response to organized labor’s precipitous decline. Many proponents of new organizing *forms* (as distinct from new strategy or tactics) advocate renewed craft, occupational or what some call “full-service unionism” (Lopez 2004, 6; see also Heckscher 2001). Most systematically exposed by Dorothy Sue Cobble (1991a), this type of unionism is analogous to that practiced by many building-trades unions, past and present. It has four basic components, as Cobble (1991b) argues:

- (1) occupational identity, (2) control over the labor supply in the occupation, (3) rights and benefits as a function of occupational membership rather than of worksite affiliation, and (4) peer control over occupational performance standards. (Cobble 1991a, 421)

RAP's vision of non-workplace unionism is broadly similar. RAP founder and director Carrie Gleason envisions RAP as a “flexible form of worker representation for the unorganized in the retail economy,” highlighting the potential of open membership organization and referring explicitly to Cobble’s proposals for “organizing the postindustrial workforce” (1991a). “RAP’s portable membership,” Gleason states, “is carried with workers as they move along industry tiers.” Operating as it does in archetypically “post-industrial” New York City, RAP’s work to date offers an opportunity to assess the viability of the occupational union model for retail sales workers. This is one goal of this chapter. RAP, however, is not simply an occupational proto-

union; indeed, the likelihood of immediate unionization on a significant scale is remote. “The underlying problem,” according to Jeff Eichler, RWDSU’s recently retired director for New York organizing, “is scale.”

Gleason describes the organization’s goals in more general terms as “building a wide network of retail workers to try to change the industry through strategic organizing and policy campaigns.” In its first five years, RAP organized workplace-based campaigns for back-wages, several of which resulted in unionization by the RWDSU, and launched its “career development” program—skills training, certification and job placement—which has evolved into a nascent form of occupational unionism. Since 2010, having greatly expanded its activity, staff and membership RAP has become increasingly autonomous from its parent organizations (RWDSU and GOLES), and has turned to policy initiatives and media outreach to highlight and improve working conditions in New York’s retail industry, in what I suggest involves a shift in focus from organizing to advocacy.

“The defining feature of the advocacy model,” Steve Jenkins argues, “is the client’s relative powerlessness to change his or her own circumstances” (2002, 61). Instead, “professionals such as lawyers and social workers *mobilize elite institutions*...to help clients achieve the changes they are seeking” (*ibid*; emphasis in original). Organizing, in contrast, aims to “creat[e] democratic organizations that are accountable to the specific needs of the people being organized” (*ibid*, 57). For Jenkins, successful organizing depends on the structurally determined “social power” of members “to *coerce* the decision-maker to make the changes they seek,” rather than persuading them through legalistic means (*ibid*, 62; emphasis in original).⁷¹

⁷¹ Jenkins’ formulation parallels concepts developed by other labor movement analysts. See, for example, Offe and Wessenthal (1980), who distinguish “monological” from “dialogical” forms of collective action. Similarly, Ganz (2009) sharply differentiates between bureaucratically-based staff-driven organizing and the development of rank-

The key distinction is between challenging existing social relationships via the collective power of members (“organizing”), or ameliorating inequality through appeal to elite institutions (“advocacy”). The second goal of this chapter is to use this distinction to assess RAP’s efforts to date. I argue that while RAP maintains many aspects of the occupational union model, based on the social power of its members, it has increasingly shifted its focus to advocacy on behalf of retail workers.⁷²

Background: Retail Unionism in New York City

Retail trade and retail unionism have a long and peculiar history in New York City, part of which was discussed in chapters 2 and 3. By the early 20th century, the city was already a mecca of mass merchandising, home to many of the nation’s most enigmatic department stores, such as Macy’s, Gimbels, Saks, and others (Strasser 2006). These stores catered to a middle and upper-class clientele, while early discounters and five-and-dimes were oriented to the burgeoning and mostly immigrant working class. In a city whose industrial base consisted largely of small-scale garment manufacturing, “department stores...housed some of the largest congregations of workers” (Freeman 2000, 19). Indeed, the upsurge of industrial unionism in the 1930s and ‘40s found vibrant expression among New York City retail workers, under the aegis of the United Retail Employees of America-CIO (forerunner of the RWDSU). Formed as a breakaway from the AFL-affiliated Retail Clerks, it was the seventh largest union in the CIO by its mid-1940s

and-file “strategic capacity” in his study of the California farm worker movement. See also Piven and Cloward (1979). All these analysts claim that the trajectory of labor organizing is neither linear nor predetermined.

⁷²The account below draws on 23 interviews with RAP members, staff, and union officials; analysis of internal RAP documents and external media coverage; and approximately 100 hours of participant observation at RAP events, meetings, and as a volunteer at its Midtown office.

peak. Some of the industrial locals it established through strikes and mass picketing, at stores like Macy's, Saks and Bloomingdale's still exist today (Harrington 1962; Opler 2007).

By 1954, five different unions claimed a total of 90,000 members among New York City's retail workforce, with the largest group, 54,000, in the RWDSU (Estey 1955, 562).⁷³ The city's retail workers numbered slightly over 300,000 at that time (New York Chamber of Commerce 1951, 1966),⁷⁴ suggesting that union density was about 30 percent (although given the propensity of unions to inflate membership figures, 25 percent may be more realistic). This was the high point of New York City retail unionism. Department stores and other retailers were already branching out into the suburbs and union attempts to organize these stores largely failed (Ziskind 2003; Opler 2007). But in the city and beyond, RWDSU Local 1199 grew rapidly, first among drug store workers and later among non-retail healthcare workers. The 80,000-member New York component of this local split from its parent union in 1986, later affiliating to the Service Employees (SEIU) in 1998 (see Fink and Greenberg 1989; Chaison 1996, 38-41). Unionism also flourished in the expanding grocery sector, primarily under the Retail Clerks and the Amalgamated Butcher Workmen, which merged in 1979 to become the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) (see Harrington 1962; Brody 1964; Walsh 1993).

Since the early 1990s, New York City sales activity has resurged, thanks to the growing population of immigrants, on the one hand, and of high-income professionals—or “gentrifiers”—on the other (Sassen 2001 [1991]; Moody 2007b). In this period big-box chains like Home Depot, Target and Best Buy entered the city, alongside the proliferation of high-priced boutiques, mostly in Manhattan (see Angotti 2008; Zukin 2004). Virtually all of these stores operate on a

⁷³ The other four were the Teamsters, the Retail Clerks International Association, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen.

⁷⁴ For 1948, the non-restaurant retail workforce in New York City was estimated at 302,147; for 1964, the corresponding figure was 304,385. Though there were likely ups and downs in the size of the retail workforce over this 16-year timeframe, it is reasonable to assume that it remained close to 300,000 in the mid-1950s.

non-union basis, however. After the initially successful organizing in the 1930s and 40s, retail unionism stagnated. The RWDSU, New York City's largest retail union, suffered especially dramatic erosion. Following the disaffiliation of Local 1199, the rest of RWDSU merged into the UFCW (which by then included its former parent union, the Retail Clerks), in 1993. Overall, although it remains far higher than in the nation as a whole, union density in New York City's retail industry had declined to only about 9 percent by the early 2000s, with considerable variation across industry subsectors, as Table 6.1 shows. Unionized workers earn slightly higher pay (averaging \$15.12 per hour) than their non-union counterparts (\$13.21).

Table 6.1: Workers, Wages, and Unionization Rates in New York City Retail, by Industry Sector, 2003-11

	Number of Workers	Percent of NYC Retail	Mean Hourly Wage	% Union
Food & beverage stores	86,688	24.0	\$10.43	13.2
Health & personal care	32,141	8.9	\$15.45	7.5
Clothing & accessories	65,036	18.0	\$14.67	4.9
General merchandisers	47,180	13.0	\$11.94	15.5
Other Sectors	130,613	36.1	\$14.84	6.8
Total	361,658	100.0	\$13.43	9.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2003-11 merged data

As Table 6.2 shows, the composition of New York's retail workforce is diverse in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, nativity, age and education. This is among the many challenges that are involved in organizing the vast non-union component of this burgeoning industry. On the other hand, the aggregated data shown obscure the fact that in some of its subsectors, the workforce is far more homogeneous. For example, in non-union supermarkets and greengrocery stores, the bulk of the workforce is comprised of Latino immigrants (Ness 2005). Efforts to organize such stores provided the context that eventually gave rise to RAP.

Table 6.2: Selected Characteristics of New York City Retail Workforce, 2003-11

Total employees	361,658
% women	42.9
% non-Hispanic White	26.2
% non-Hispanic Black	23.3
% Hispanic/Latino	30.3
% non-Hispanic Asian	16.7
% non-Hispanic Other	3.5
% foreign born	52.2
% age 16 - 24	22.6
% age 25 - 55	65.2
% age 55+	12.2
% less than high school education	20.5
% with high school diploma	37.0
% with some college	23.3
% with Bachelor's degree or more	19.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2003-11 merged data

Workplace Campaigns

RAP's formation in 2005 was partly inspired by two non-traditional unionization drives: an effort in the late 1990s and early 2000s to organize city greengrocers, and the RWDSU's 2005 ¡Despierta Bushwick! ("Wake Up Bushwick!") campaign with Make the Road New York. Local 169 of the Union of Needletrades Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) launched the greengrocer campaign, with no initial involvement on the part the UFCW or RWDSU.⁷⁵ Three things set it apart from traditional union drives: its reliance on coalition-building with vibrant immigrant workers' groups; its use of strikes, boycotts and mass demonstrations; and its leveraging of wage-and-hour lawsuits, supported by the New York State Attorney General's office, to bargain for employer neutrality in union organizing. The campaign ultimately

⁷⁵However, the campaign's final and less successful phase was overseen by a UFCW local.

succeeded in gaining union recognition and contracts at several stores, raising wages to the legal minimum and obtaining an enforceable Code of Conduct in 2002 (Ness 2005, 58-96).

Local 169's organizing director, Jeff Eichler, joined the RWDSU staff shortly after the greengrocer campaign ended. Convinced of "the need to find other sources of worker identity and solidarity" beyond the often precarious low-wage workplace, Eichler helped initiate the ¡Despierta Bushwick! campaign in 2005 as a joint effort with Make the Road. This was one of RWDSU's first community partnerships, targeting low-wage retailers on Knickerbocker Avenue in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. Like the greengrocer campaign, it began with a wage-and-hour lawsuit, proceeded to consumer boycotts, public rallies, and eventually the threat of sanction by the state Attorney General, all of which resulted in a union contract for workers at ten Footco stores across the city (Hetland 2009). As Eichler recalled, Footco's owner was "very confused by the multiple fronts of attack" and, in return for an end to the boycott, signed a "good business community agreement" providing for neutrality in union organizing.

This successful campaign led RWDSU organizers to seek out other wage-and-hour violators as strategic targets. The union decided to target the lower-Manhattan neighborhood of SoHo due to its growing density of branded retail outlets and flagship stores for national and international chains. Another plus was the nearby presence of GOLES, a tenants' rights organization that had roots in the neighborhood dating back to the 1970s. "At the time," director Damaris Reyes explains, GOLES was "working on some economic justice, small business issues, job readiness stuff and we wanted to look more at some of the workers' rights issues." To GOLES organizers, "it seemed like a good fit" when the RWDSU approached them with the idea of a partnership, and it was Reyes, in fact, who coined the name "RAP".

Once a framework for cooperation was agreed upon, two RWDSU organizers began researching Soho retail employers with wage and hour violations. One of them was Carrie Gleason, a Cornell University graduate and visual artist who had spent several years organizing hotel workers and would later head RAP. Gleason and co-organizer Sadatu Mamah-Trawill, who also came from the hotel workers' union, soon discovered wage and hour violations at the Yellow Rat Bastard (YRB) clothing chain. Workers were being paid as little as \$5.25 an hour when the legal minimum was \$6.00 (and even after it rose to \$6.75 in 2006), with many West African immigrants relegated exclusively to stock work and suffering the most egregious violations. The organizers were amazed to learn that YRB workers received accurate paystubs that documented their hours and the illegal rate of pay. Jennifer, a former sales associate who was eighteen when the campaign began, recalls:

A lot of the time I was working for free,⁷⁶ it was off the books; six dollars, maybe a little less, and I was paid in cash. And not only that, they also had me working like a manager, they would have me do everything a manager would do: I trained employees, I would help hire, I also did visual displays, so I had the position of three, but I was getting paid nothing. But you know, I was young, I was happy, I was like 'oh my God, maybe they'll promote me!' Maybe, even though in that company they don't promote women—there's no such thing as that. Everyone in management was men, there was no women, we were like lower class.

Her first conversation with Gleason was a turning point in her attitude toward the store, her job, and management:

When Carrie came to me—she was the first person [from RAP] that ever spoke to me—and told me all of these things that were going on, I didn't even feel like it affected me that much, it was other workers there who were close to me, immigrants from Africa and it was really affecting them. And when I saw the difference—they were being treated literally like slaves, they were working eighteen hours sometimes straight, and they were always in the basement and it was like, really bad. So that was the turning point for me when I saw the big change for them.

⁷⁶ By "free" she refers to being paid insufficiently and working off the clock.

Along with Mamah-Trawill, who is of West African descent, Jennifer went on to play a key role in the campaign. The first challenge was to build trust for RAP's effort among the immigrant workers at the store. Though deeply dissatisfied, they were unfamiliar with the fledgling organization and wary of management retribution. Several LGBT workers, however, who had "faced intense homophobia by their managers" and thus felt "less allegiance to the company" (Gleason), became crucial to winning over others. Eventually, a group of YRB workers agreed to be party to a back-wage lawsuit filed by the state Attorney General's office. RAP organized weekly one-day boycotts and store-front rallies of workers and community members mobilized by GOLES. When the owner was arrested in late 2007 for violation of state labor law, he agreed to settle the back-wage suit for both frontline workers and first-line supervisors. According to Mamah-Trawill, "that was the [end] goal—we didn't go in to organize them to become union members."

As the 2008 economic downturn ate into company revenues, the owner claimed he would be unable to make further payments. RAP managed to turn this crisis into an opportunity, persuading the employer to accept card-check union recognition. The final settlement included \$1.4 million in back pay for over 1,000 current and former YRB employees, as well as union recognition for RWDSU on behalf of workers at New York City's seven Yellow Rat Bastard stores. The workers won their first union contract with the RWDSU in 2009. This became the defining success story of RAP's initial phase.

Three further RAP campaigns grew out of the YRB struggle, all directed at local retail chains based in or near SoHo. Back-wage cases were launched at Shoemania, Scoop NYC, and Mystique Boutique (owned by the brother of YRB's owner), with one of these (Shoemania) leading to union recognition and a contract in 2012. All three cases exhibited similar dynamics to

YRB: small, New York-based stores, flagrant wage-and-hour violations, and ethnically divided workforces (predominantly West African stock workers and native-born sales workers). The Scoop and Shoemia campaigns began in late 2008 with back-pay lawsuits, and in the Scoop case, charges of discrimination as well.⁷⁷ The Mystique drive followed in mid-2009. All three efforts utilized worker committees, public demonstrations and regular customer service and workers' rights training sessions conducted by RAP organizers. At Scoop, divisions between backroom stock and front-room sales workers proved insurmountable, with the latter declining to sign onto the lawsuit or join the campaign. According to RWDSU organizers, this prevented the negotiation of a neutrality agreement that could have aided unionization. At Shoemia, one organizer declared, attaining such an agreement was "the only thing that allowed the [union] win—we couldn't get people to sign cards until we got the employer to stop the terror [against union supporters]." Even so, the card-check majority was twice disputed by the owner and only resolved through arbitration. In February 2010, these efforts culminated in a "March of Hearts" down Broadway that united workers from all three campaigns as well as the YRB drive. The Scoop back-wage case was settled in 2010 for an undisclosed amount, and the Mystique case in 2012 for \$925,000.

Taken together, these four campaigns were the highlights of the first phase of RAP's development, when it was still an internal project of the RWDSU. The success at YRB in particular validated Gleason's perspective that organizing was possible among Manhattan-based, non-food retailers, while raising the profile of the nascent organization in the local area and among immigrant workers. All four campaigns depended on significant rank-and-file worker activism to pursue the lawsuits, to turn people out for rallies and, in the cases of YRB and

⁷⁷ Managers had illegally refused to accept West African employees' valid work authorization forms, dismissing several because of this.

Shoemia, to gather union cards. As one organizer put it, through RAP the “RWDSU has now developed a model to organize these specific [New York-based, non-corporate] employers on a store-by-store basis.” The model included back-pay lawsuits, “hot shops” with some degree of ethnic solidarity, community support (GOLES), and geographic continuity (SoHo and environs).

But the applicability of this model for the city's overall retail sector is questionable, since corporate retailers—like Target—are very different from the small retail operations targeted in these early campaigns. Eichler notes that “healthcare and pensions are often too expensive for such low-ball employers, at this end of the industry, to even negotiate on.” This brings us to the question posed by Jenkins as to “whether a given group of people, if organized, would have the power to force changes from the institutions they are confronting” (2002, 58). Workers at YRB, Shoemia, Scoop and Mystique were able, with RAP's help, to win back wages owed them by legal mandate; in two cases they also obtained union contracts that provided regular wage increases (although not health or pension benefits), paid sick leave and formal grievance procedures. The primary source of leverage, however, was not workers' social power to “stop production,” or in this case, distribution (Burns 2011). Instead, it was the combination of employers' non-compliance with existing wage and hour law, a proactive Attorney General's office, and the RAP organizers' ability to channel worker grievances into a formal lawsuit. Furthermore, because of the thin profit margins of such firms, workers at YRB and Shoemia, although “organized,” have little prospect of making more substantial gains.⁷⁸

These campaigns, then, were organizing efforts with a strong advocacy component, unlikely to significantly alter power relations between retail employers and employees in New York City. RAP organizers are well aware of this. Indeed, the inherent limitations of store-by-store, back-wage-lawsuit campaigning motivated RAP's shift in late 2010 to an “open

⁷⁸ In July 2012, Shoemia closed its Manhattan stores, citing financial difficulties (McCarty 2012; Grinspan 2012).

membership model” and what Gleason calls “the project of really building RAP as an organization.”

Career Development

One key interest that RAP identified among retail workers in this early phase of its development was skills training. The organization therefore began offering skill-building workshops like the one described at the beginning of this chapter. What RAP calls its “career development” program not only certifies members’ skills, but helps some of them gain greater employment security and upward mobility. It also attracts new members, expanding the organization’s reach beyond individual workplaces and sometimes bringing hot shops to RAP’s attention, which can become the focus of later campaigns. RAP’s career development program contributes to the four components of occupational unionism defined by Cobble, as quoted above, each of which I briefly consider in the remainder of this section.

Control over the Labor Supply

“At the heart of occupational unionism,” states Cobble, “lay a reliance on union-run hiring halls and the closed shop” (1991b, 138). The key source of leverage for any occupation-based as opposed to workplace-based union is thus control over the labor supply in a given market, or what Wright terms “marketplace structural power” (2000, 962). Achieving this has two aspects: 1) organizing workers to seek work through the union instead of individually, and 2) organizing employers to hire only, or at least preferentially, through the union. The first entails making clear the benefits of membership and delivering on those benefits, which in turn, depends on members’ active participation in upholding standards for pay, conditions and work rules. The

second is more puzzling: why should employers give hiring preference to union members? Some might argue that union workers are better trained and more reliable, providing a form of "value added." But in most cases, "organizing" employers requires pressure tactics, such as "top-down" legal or corporate campaigns, and/or more "bottom-up" forms of direct action—boycotts, strikes or slowdowns (see Milkman 2006, 150-55).

RAP's main focus is on recruiting workers, although it has taken initial steps toward employers as well. Among the services offered to RAP members are help with job searches, resume preparation, interview training and referral to open positions. RAP has set up an online job bank called CREW (Connecting Retailers with an Exceptional Workforce) through which it has placed members in various Manhattan stores. In the context of a weak economy and high unemployment since 2008, job search help has become an increasingly significant part of RAP's service provision and a primary means of outreach to new members. When asked why they have stayed with the organization, long-term members often cite hiring help. For example, Jennifer, who played a key role in the YRB campaign, recalls, "They helped me find other jobs; they helped me with resumes, workshops, all sorts of things." Similarly, another active member, Angelo, explains that RAP has "enabled me to either find other gigs or to meet people who want to collaborate on different projects."

RAP has also facilitated hiring for some members at RWDSU-organized stores such as Macy's; at YRB, the union obtained a preferential hiring clause in its contract. Obtaining more such agreements and enforcing them could be a key mechanism for RAP to gain control over the retail labor supply. Since RAP is not a union, however, it cannot be party to these agreements; it therefore can only accomplish this goal by collaborating with the RWDSU or other traditional unions.

Training and job placement also constitute attempts to control the labor supply by creating mobility paths within the retail trade. According to Gleason:

Our professional development trainings provide the opportunity for workers to talk about what they've done, what their knowledge is. It's a re-valuing of skills, and because people have worked in so many stores, it gives them industry analysis where they can compare from one store to the next and think about what their career might be and what their opportunities for advancement might be.

Such “bridging” occurs not only through job referrals by members and RWDSU allies who work in higher-wage retail, but also through RAP’s workshops on customer service, visual merchandising and “from retail to showroom” (about moving into wholesale occupations). At one such workshop, an older RAP member with twenty years’ experience as a showroom saleswoman and fashion designer explained to participants how trade shows are organized, how one develops a client book and how skills gained in retail—product knowledge, selling ability—can be transferred into wholesale work. In developing such paths of mobility, RAP is challenging employers’ erosion of internal labor markets through deskilling and casualization (see chapter 4). At present, however, RAP’s job search and placement services are precisely that—services. They help to expand and maintain membership through what Gleason terms the “services-to-organizing model”—to access the full range of services, one must be a dues-paying RAP member and regularly attend membership meetings and other events. But this alone is not likely to lead to truly “controlling the labor supply,” as RAP’s leaders are aware.

RAP has also compiled a list of friendly stores and chains through “employer outreach” by members and staff. However, these efforts remain at what Eichler calls “an embryonic stage.” To significantly impact employers’ hiring practices and gain meaningful control over the retail labor supply in New York City—or even Manhattan—RAP would have to provide either such

superior retail employees that companies would actively seek them out, or collaborate with traditional unions to pressure employers into preferential hiring agreements.

Peer Control over Performance and Standards

In contrast to Fordist-era industrial unions, which “lost the will and ambition to wrest control of production from capitalist hands and turned ever more to bargaining over labor’s share in the product” (Braverman 1974, 8), occupational unions provide mechanisms for skill maintenance and enforcement of work rules. As Cobble notes, this is achieved through training and apprenticeships (1991b, 141), an approach that RAP is actively developing. It offers a variety of course offerings, the most frequent and best attended of which—customer service training—provides participants with a certificate from a local community college upon completion. This process actively engages members, as an organizer explained:

We do trainings and they are a way that we develop our members to become teachers. So we can see that they have skills, and some will come in and I’ll do their resume and be working with them and realize that, ‘you have so much experience, would you be interested in sharing this with the other members?’ And so then they come, we sign them up to be a trainer with CWE [Consortium for Worker Education], and they come in a few times and work with me to develop, to kind of tease out all the information and develop a curriculum, and practice with them to develop a workshop.

RAP’s skills-training is aimed at developing workers’ confidence, awareness of their tacit skills and the ability to articulate and pass these on to peers. Another aspect is purely utilitarian: helping unemployed people find work or those in low-wage, dead-end jobs move into more lucrative sectors of the trade. The consistent emphasis on member-led training sessions and the interaction of growing numbers of New York City sales workers with RAP’s educational program has created a space for peer-based construction of occupational norms. As Cheryl, a

five-year retail veteran who first attended a RAP customer service workshop in July 2011 and has since become an active member, explains:

Going through the training, that's when we started to get a more in-depth idea, feeling of what we've already been through [in retail], what we have yet to experience and being able to feel like we're prepared for the future as far as customer service and retail is concerned.

Asked what she thought of the workers' rights portion of the workshop, she adds:

That was one of the key components that drew you in even more, because it was like, "Wow, I didn't know that I am getting paid next to nothing and there are other people getting paid worse than me!" And to know that I have a voice, that I can speak up, that I can do something about it, make it change, as far as my living standards and arrangements is concerned. So it was good to know about the workers' rights.

In its efforts to raise worker confidence and generate peer-based norms—and eventually control—of performance and standards, RAP's worker rights training plays a key role, as Cheryl attests. But as in the struggle to gain control over the labor supply, RAP is swimming against the tide of management-driven deskilling and the devaluing of emotional labor central to sales work (Hochschild 1983; Benson 1986; Leidner 1993). Talisa Erazo, a long-time member and current retail worker who serves as president of RAP's board of directors, notes:

Management and people high up are realizing that by cutting hours and making turn-around a lot faster for workers—people who quit or firing people—they are saving money. They don't need to give raises, they don't need to give benefits, it's just ten hours a week and they'll probably just quit in the end. Their idea is that we'll make as many profits as we can and we're going to figure out how to do that the fastest way possible, the easiest way possible.

Occupational Rights and Protections

As Cobble notes, whereas industrial unions seek job security for their members in a given workplace, occupational unions instead aim to offer workers employment security, through hiring halls and other mechanisms. Because job shifts are frequent, occupational unions commonly provide members with portable health, pension and other benefits that workplace-

based industrial unions typically obtain from employers through collective bargaining. With this in mind, RAP is in the process of setting up group-sponsored benefit packages for healthcare, unemployment, professional development and banking services. Other New York-based workers' organizations—the Taxi Workers' Alliance, Restaurant Opportunities Center and the Freelancers' Union in particular—offer models of benefit provision that RAP's leaders hope to emulate. RAP is already able to offer its members consumer benefits, such as discount cards for dental work, basic health and mental health services, medication and public transport. RAP staff also counsel members with pressing needs as to where they can access services.

Unlike the other components of occupational unionism, benefit provision seems feasible even at this early stage of RAP's development. But the more robust goal of providing employment security—through a hiring hall that can offer members regular work—is at best a distant prospect.

Occupational Identity

If control over labor supply is the *structural* foundation of occupational unionism, occupational identity is the *subjective* basis for sustaining member involvement and collective self-management. RAP actively seeks to foster such a common identity among its members, with some results as Joseph, a long-time RAP member who previously worked at Target⁷⁹ and is now an organizer for a non-retail union, explains:

I thought [organized] labor was like guys in overalls with jackhammers and hardhats, you know, spittin' tobacco and I was like, "Why retail? That's a joke—you know, retail sucks, this is for kids!" ...I didn't realize how many people work in retail and for how many it's their main source of income, and I saw that through RAP all the time...I was able to learn how important changing retail is... Whether or not they want to stay there forever, but to think this job is important, it does produce value for society, it deserves

⁷⁹ Though not one of the stores I studied.

dignity, it's worth fighting for, it is organizable—off the bat, that was the big lesson that I learned from RAP.

Joseph alludes to a significant hurdle in RAP's attempt to build occupational identity: the social devaluation of retail sales and customer service work and the view that such jobs aren't "real jobs," which is widespread among many retail workers.

RAP organizers understand this well. As Gleason relates, "there's this idea among some workers that retail is something you're doing while working toward something else." Training sessions are thus a conscious attempt at "infusing a craft identity" into a largely non-craft industry. To this end, the organization integrates long-term sales personnel into its activities whenever possible, since such workers tend to have stronger occupational identification than their younger counterparts. This is aided by RAP's organizational and physical proximity to the Macy's workers' union hall—RWDSU Local 1-S, one floor above: several 1-S members regularly participate in RAP planning meetings, workers' rights and skills-training workshops, and a former 1-S shop steward is now a full-time RAP organizer.

As with controlling the labor supply and achieving peer-based performance standards, RAP is fighting an uphill battle in its attempts to build occupational identity among an increasingly deskilled and socially heterogeneous workforce. Yet this may be RAP's most original contribution to retail organizing: rather than trying to win union representation elections in isolated workplaces, or organizing around non-work identities such as race, ethnicity or nativity, RAP is creating a community of workers organized around occupational identities.

Policy and Media

In the fall of 2011 RAP conducted a survey of retail workers in New York, interviewing 436 workers from 230 non-union stores across all five boroughs. Earlier that year, the

organization had acquired its own office, filed for non-profit status, and added several new staff members. But the survey project signaled a new level of visibility and activity. Members were present in the office more often than before, working in teams of two or three, discussing protocol, heading into the city and returning hours later with completed questionnaires, debriefing about their experiences and preparing for the next day. RAP issued a report on its findings, *Discounted Jobs: How Retailers Sell Workers Short*, on a rainy Tuesday in January 2012 outside the annual conference of the National Retail Federation, the dominant employers' association in the industry. This garnered front-page coverage for both the study and RAP in the *New York Metro*, as well as an article in the *New York Times*.

A primary finding of *Discounted Jobs*, which reflected RAP members' own experience and is consistent with my findings at Macy's and Target, was the pervasiveness of unpredictable 'just-in-time' scheduling practices and the havoc they wreak on employees' lives. As Dominique, a RAP member and long-time retail worker, explains, "scheduling is a huge problem—they often make schedules in a way that you don't actually have a life, so that you will revolve around your job." Similarly, Joseph, a former Target worker, recounted his experience:

I explained to them [management] that I was in school and had to be there two days a week. So it was quite easy—don't schedule me then. They still would. If I told them they would take me off, but it was always grudgingly and it was like, oh I'd signed a contract that said I can't possibly do that. I found out after they had hired me [that although] I put on my application that I was part-time ... it's not possible to work less than five days a week.

RAP's study uncovered five aspects of retail scheduling that are especially onerous for workers: involuntary part-time status, "on-call" shifts where one is expected to be available without guarantee of work or other compensation, being sent home early, frequent schedule changes, and hours being given by managers as "rewards" for high sales. As the report put it, "workers are

now competing with each other over sales, not for commission, but just to ‘get on the schedule.’” (Luce and Fujita 2012, 14)

In response to employers’ scheduling tactics—what Naoki Fujita, RAP’s policy coordinator, argues is “part of an anti-union strategy”—RAP has developed its *Just Hours* policy campaign designed to “win stronger state policies that give retail workers stable, predictable, and livable work hours” (RAP email 5/30/2012, in author’s possession). This campaign was launched on October 17, 2012 with twin rallies in front of Abercrombie & Fitch and Urban Outfitters stores on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan featuring workers from each store who had suffered low or unpredictable hours and since joined RAP. This direct action component of *Just Hours* targets individual employers’ scheduling practices. As Fujita explains, the goal is to “create a code of conduct and ask a good employer in New York to sign onto it,” and then pressure other, ‘less good’ employers to comply with the same standard.

Another aspect of *Just Hours* is the proposed Predictable Scheduling Act, which RAP is promoting with support from the National Employment Law Project and the advocacy group “A Better Balance.” This legislation, if passed by the New York City Council, “would apply to large retail employers operating in the New York City market. These companies would be required to provide weekly schedules advance notice before the workweek begins, would require workers’ consent for scheduling changes and would give workers the right to make scheduling requests.” (United NY and Center for Popular Democracy 2013, 21)

Closely connected to these policy initiatives are RAP’s growing efforts to gain media attention. Since early 2011 the member-composed Art and Media Committee has met on a monthly basis to develop creative ways to highlight the plight of retail workers and raise RAP’s profile. One of the most visible results of the committee’s work was its flash-mob “Interns’

Night Out” in September 2011. Staged as a mock fashion show during fashion week’s “Fashion Night Out,” the action involved more than twenty RAP members who wore T-shirts, passed out flyers and sang songs condemning the industry’s widespread use of unpaid interns. The concept was developed entirely by RAP members, with staff assisting in the planning and execution, and sought to build links with underpaid (or unpaid) workers in the retail-related field of fashion, with which many members already had an affinity. Another committee project is a “RAP rap” about scheduling hassles set to the tune of Jay-Z’s “Hard Knock Life”.

RAP is also engaged in more conventional media outreach. In late 2011 the organization hired Yana Walton as a full-timer dedicated to communications and media work. “All these big retailers,” she explains, “have massive PR teams and huge budgets to be able to make sure that everything is heard from their point of view...[getting] coverage for what it is like for people who actually *work* there—that’s how I see my job.” *Discounted Jobs* came to the attention of U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), who then invited a leading RAP member to testify about her experiences with erratic retail scheduling before a U.S. Senate Committee in May 2012. “Media is the ultimate legitimizer of what we are saying,” says Walton, “it’s like a huge microphone and essential part of any legislative campaign.”

RAP’s policy offensive counters the employer-dominated discourse and legal framework for retail employment relations, while also educating members about the systematic character of workplace injustice and developing their skills—such as public speaking and strategic thinking. This helps to set the stage for future workplace or occupational organizing. At the same time, however, an aspect of RAP’s messaging has the potential to divert members’ focus away from power-based organizing. A central component of RAP’s policy narrative is that it is in employers’ interest to institute “high-road” employment practice. As Erazo explains:

[Employers] are not realizing that their profits can go up if they keep the same workers, keep them happy and make sure they're not getting sick and making other workers sick. So those profits that they are seeing in making those quick turnarounds and hiring a lot of different people, they could be making the same ones if they kept the workers and treated them well, but nobody's bringing this realization to management or the people at the NRF.

But RAP's own successes at YRB and Shoemia provide evidence counter to this:

despite workers gaining union contracts with the RWDSU at both chains, they have been unable to obtain healthcare and pension plans or even middle-class wages from their employers, due to thin profit margins. And large national chains, such as Walmart, Target or JCPenney which *do* have large surpluses but invest millions in internal union prevention and anti-union lobbying, are deeply committed to the low-road path. RAP's appeal to employers' self-interest as a pathway to improving conditions in the industry not only seems quixotic in the face of the dominant approach of employers in this sector, but may also deflect members' energies away from building workplace or marketplace social power. Although RAP has not abandoned workplace organizing or the development of member power, its increasing focus on policy and media—combined with employer-friendly rhetoric—highlights this risk.

Summary

Originating in 2005 as a campaign-oriented coalition between the RWDSU and GOLES, RAP has evolved into an autonomous, member-based worker center with an active career development program, budding policy initiatives and an expanding public presence. Its most original contribution to the field of retail organizing is its avoidance of the traditional workplace-based, electoral path to worker representation and its embrace of an open-membership, activist-based model. Occupational organizing, as outlined by Cobble, is one avenue down which RAP may continue to travel, but in doing so it must confront significant challenges.

The biggest challenge involves scale: less than one in ten retail workers in New York City are union members, or about 30,000 individuals. But just over 2000 workers are part of RAP's network. Without significantly greater organization, RAP cannot hope to exercise meaningful influence over retail employers. Another critical challenge is deskilling, which has been pervasive in retail over recent years (see chapter 4). Little to no specific training is required for a majority of entry-level positions, which translates into fewer opportunities for RAP to act as an intermediary between retail employers and job-seekers. In implicit recognition of these formidable obstacles to occupational unionism, RAP's leaders are pursuing a multi-pronged strategy that includes a policy and media component, career development programs, as well as workplace campaigns.

Advancing on the policy front—winning improved enforcement of existing laws, new legislation, or instituting a voluntary code of conduct with key employers—can open the door to further occupational organizing, further workplace organizing, or it can be limited to advocacy, in Jenkins' terms. The career development program, birthed during RAP's campaign phase, helps to recruit new members while providing job-help services for existing members and engendering a mechanism for possible labor-supply control and worker self-management in the future. In the short run, however, it primarily involves service provision rather than organizing, and is unlikely to contribute much to RAP's stated goal of “improv[ing] retail jobs.” RAP's *multi-pronged* strategy, in which policy initiatives, service provision and legal advocacy serve as means to the broader end of transforming the industry and opening up new possibilities for member-based organizing, reflects the limitations on what is possible in any one field (workplace, occupational or policy).

In the short run, however, RAP functions primarily as an advocacy-based incubator of workplace-based campaigns and a mobilizing force for policy initiatives. It continues to embrace several aspects of the occupational union model, but has recognized the many challenges that involves and will likely not pursue this as a long-term goal. Meanwhile, RAP is providing much-needed support to retail workers in New York City while familiarizing a new generation of workers with the ideas of economic justice and collective organization, a task which may help spark a resurgence of a broad-based post-industrial labor movement.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The driving purpose of this study was to interrogate the failure, as yet, of the U.S. labor movement to make significant gains in membership or influence among this country's burgeoning low-wage service workforce. Having considered the views and proposals of union revitalization theorists, it appeared to the author that sectorally focused discussions that paid close attention to the internal dynamics of work itself were notably absent in the debate. This seemed odd given that a parallel literature on the nature of service work had grown up during the same period as U.S. labor's post-Fordist decline, and all the more odd against the backdrop of an earlier yet highly influential labor process debate that saw the intrinsic dynamics of work as integral to the development of class consciousness and the trajectory of labor movements.

My study has attempted to fill the gap in this triangle through an analysis of work, consciousness and organizing in a strategically chosen sector of the U.S. economy. Retail was chosen because it is the largest service industry employing a predominantly low-wage, non-union workforce; department stores were chosen because they employ the largest portion of all retail workers and are pivotal within the industry; and Macy's and Target's New York City stores were chosen because they provided the opportunity to compare unionized, 'traditional' stores with non-union discounters in the same urban environment. Finally, the Retail Action Project served as the subject of my organizing investigation since it is one of the only retail-focused worker centers in the U.S., has pursued several of the most prominent strategies outlined by union revitalization theorists, and again, operates in the same city as the two firms studied.

Analysis of these three cases was intended to yield answers to the four research questions posed at the outset, to which I also derived a series of relevant hypotheses. To the first question—how have service labor processes changed over time?—theory provided four possible

answers: deskilling, upgrading, contingency or contestation. To the second—how is service work currently structured?—I first delineated three dimensions of labor processes in general (intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics), then outlined seven ways in which contemporary services may diverge from or alter these: 1) emotional labor, 2) less collectivization, 3) greater sex-typing, 4) triadic workplace structures, 5) lower pay and job security, 6) less adverse working conditions and 7) greater proportions of “secondary” workers. To the third question—how do these structures shape workers’ class consciousness?—I proposed general ways in which intrinsic, extrinsic and worker characteristics should impact the four elements of workplace-based class consciousness (dissatisfaction, occupational identity, coworker solidarity, management opposition), as well as more specific effects stemming from each of the seven hypothesized service attributes. Lastly, in response to the fourth question about effective strategies for organizing service workers, I identified three prominent proposals: comprehensive workplace organizing, occupational organizing, and policy-focused campaigning. I now assess the answers provided by my three case studies.

In chapter 2 I took a close look at the organization of work in two New York Macy’s stores, both of whose workforces are represented by the same union, RWDSU Local 1-S. What I found was a set of workplaces that are relatively decentralized, in which workers are divided not only by occupation (sales, stock, supervision, etc.) but extensively by product, price and brand. Salespersons are thus considerably specialized in their departments, interacting little with those in others. Within departments, although a latent tendency towards the collectivization of maintenance tasks was found, the overarching feature of sales work at Macy’s is its *individualization*: each salesperson, commissioned or not, is required to meet daily sales goals measured on four discrete criteria. Achieving these requires considerable product knowledge in

some cases and a significant dose of interpersonal ability in most. Wages and benefits are low overall, but higher for some longer-tenured employees, while the evolved contractual relationship between workers and managers at these stores was found to contribute to more adversarial patterns of supervision. Lastly, although most respondents were under thirty and had been in their jobs for less than five years, there was an identifiable layer of older, longer-tenured and more primary-positioned workers at both Macy's stores. The demographics of Macy's workforce were thus found to display dualism with regard to age and labor-market position. In sum, the organization of work at Macy's was described as *inverted Taylorism* since it exhibits individualized selling designed to increase output and spur competition, while at the same time a broad-banding of non-selling tasks within departments.

Chapter 3 then undertook a parallel examination of work at three Target stores. In contrast to the decentralization and individualization of sales work at Macy's, Target's model was found to be highly centralized and collectivized, with both achieved through greater mechanization (i.e. computerization) of the sales and replenishment process. Selling is organized as a group process with only group (rather than individual) goals set and measured by management. At the same time, this collectivization is only achieved via the simplification and standardization of salespersons' tasks, which simultaneously involve a lower level of worker autonomy when compared to their Macy's analogues. As at Macy's, Target's wages and benefits are low overall but not *as* low for entry-level workers—a surprise given that Macy's, not Target, is the unionized firm. Labor-management relations are markedly more collaborative given the absence of unionism at Target, and this was found to allow for (and partly result from) that company's deliberately anti-union approach. Dualism of age and job tenure is much less pronounced at Target than at Macy's, with a larger proportion of the former's workforce

consisting of young and transient workers holding secondary labor-market positions; Caribbean ethnicity is also a source of common identity among many workers at two of the stores studied. Target's labor process was described as *service Toyotism* since it displays several attributes—just-in-time and computerized product replenishment, team-work design, job rotation and huddles—characteristic of the lean system of manufacturing popularized by the Toyota Corporation (and other Japanese automakers) in the 1980s and 90s.

In chapter 4 I compared my findings from these first two empirical chapters to derive answers to the first two research questions. Using Macy's and Target as contemporary proxies for historical modes of department store organization—the 'traditional' and the discount—I found that transformations of the salesperson's occupation from Macy's to Target could most accurately be understood as *deskilling* insofar as the primary elements of skill—autonomy and task complexity—underwent a noticeable decline from one mode to the next. While Macy's was found to exhibit similar tendencies as Target towards the degradation of salespersons' tasks, two factors seemed to limit this: first, Macy's relatively upscale, brand-conscious market orientation, and second, the presence of an active union in the workplace. Because deskilling was found to be partially resisted by organized workers at Macy's and largely enabled by the absence of such organization at Target, Edwards' *contestation* model was judged to be a more accurate description of these changes than Braverman's more mechanistic account.

The second task of chapter 4 was to assess the veracity of the seven hypothesized attributes of service work in contrast to manufacturing. While emotional labor is required of many frontline workers at both Macy's and Target, more of it and more intense forms are required of Macy's salespersons than either Target salespersons or cashiers. In fact, the declining intensity of emotional labor between the two stores is part and parcel of the deskilling process.

Collectivization, however, was found to increase significantly as I moved from Macy's to Target, displaying a parallel evolution to earlier shifts from craft to mass-production techniques.

Segregation by sex was evident at both workplaces, though it took somewhat different forms (along product/commission lines at Macy's, along occupational lines—i.e. cashiers vs. stock workers—at Target); pay, benefits and job security were found to be comparably low at both stores; working conditions broadly similar; and a noticeable increase in the proportion of secondary as opposed to primary workers was found at Target when compared with Macy's.

Combining these dynamics from each individual workplace into a holistic model along the lines of Edwards' (1979) three "systems of control," I identified Target's mode of work organization as ideal-typical of an emergent fourth regime: *contingent control*, consisting of four interlocking elements—contingent employment, standardized work, a 'benevolent' bureaucracy and a pliant, largely secondary workforce—and posited of large, for-profit service organizations. Macy's was found to exhibit several of these elements, though to a lesser and less complete extent; it was therefore deemed an imperfect version of Target's contingent control model, or what I described as a workplace in transition.

Following analysis of the retail labor process, I then turned to address the third research question regarding consciousness in chapter 5. Using the four dimensions of workplace-based class consciousness plus a general category for union receptivity, I found marked and significant differences between Macy's and Target respondents. On the whole, Macy's workers exhibited greater class consciousness on all aspects save solidarity, which was much more common among Target workers. The sources of these differences appeared to be multiple, but analysis supported the primary impact of both workplace dynamics and age (operationalized as over or under thirty). On all dimensions except solidarity, Target workers were found to be less class

conscious, albeit among a non-representative sample. Given the differences between Target and Macy's along both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects, this allows for an assessment of hypotheses about the impact of service work dynamics on workers' class consciousness. Specifically, where emotional labor is both more intense and more integral to daily routines (Macy's), workers are *more* class conscious, contradicting the first service-work hypothesis. Then, where collectivization is greater (Target), workers are found to be *less* class conscious with the key exception of solidarity—the primary predicted effect of increased collectivization; this finding thus lends support to the general claim that more collectivized workforces will exhibit greater solidarity. Sex-typing, working conditions, pay and benefits are not markedly different between Macy's and Target, and none (save the last, though equally across both stores) figured prominently in respondent's reasons for their views. Job security, however, is significantly greater at Macy's (due to union presence) and, in combination with longer tenures and more mentally engaging work, was found alongside greater occupational identity, again supporting *that* general claim from chapter 1.

A key complicating factor to all of this, however, is the presence of an active union at Macy's and the absence of such—as well as robust anti-unionism—at Target; this distinction accounted for a fair portion of management opposition and pro-union attitudes among Macy's workers and their converses among Target workers. But despite Target managers' persistent union avoidance schemes, more than a third of those interviewed wanted a union in their workplace, and many of those who didn't were simply unfamiliar with what a union was or how it could affect working conditions. In sum, although the project of organizing big-box retail workers, such as those at Target, faces formidable challenges with regard to workers' consciousness and managerial resistance, inroads exist in the solidarity engendered by team-

based work systems and the common identity of youth and, in some cases, ethnicity. These latter findings echo the studies of Tannock (2001) with regard to youth and Milkman (2006), Ness (2005) and Fine (2006) with regard to ethnicity—namely, that both can serve as catalyzing sources of collective, pro-union sentiments, but are too seldom appealed to by existing workers' organizations.

The role of Local 1-S—and by extension, similar unions in retail and other service workplaces—in both engendering and mitigating some workers' willingness to organize also deserves comment. Among current Macy's workers, experience with this union was positive overall, though a minority of respondents with both pro- and anti-union predilections voiced substantive complaints. But the small number of Target workers who had previously worked at unionized Macy's stores pointed to the obvious shortcoming of Local 1-S in achieving entry level pay equivalent to that of non-union Target. Furthermore, Macy's "high-conflict/low-trust pattern" (Kochan *et al.* 1986) of shop floor relations—partly the product of an evolved collective bargaining system—were a source of dissatisfaction for many former and current workers. Without tangible wage premiums, or realistic prospects thereof, the adversarial culture at unionized Macy's risks alienating the current generation of workers from the potential and historically real benefits of union organization.

Finally, I considered three types of campaigns pursued by an innovative, retail-focused workers' center in New York City—the Retail Action Project—in chapter 6. The goal of this was to assess the viability of three prominent organizing strategies put forth by union revitalization theorists in recent decades, *as they pertain to retail*. RAP's comprehensive, workplace-based organizing drives displayed the continued utility of this method, a la Bronfenbrenner *et al.* (1998), for organizing at least small retail firms with proven records of labor law violation.

Combined with the legal leverage such cases provided—made useable by a pro-active Attorney General’s office—intensive worker involvement, repeated public rallies and community boycotts proved effective for winning back wages (at three) and unionizing workers (at two) local New York chains. But the utility of this strategy for organizing larger swaths of retail workers, particularly those at large corporate chains, appears minimal, which RAP’s own leaders have apparently recognized.

Because of this, the organization has also pursued occupational organizing along a quasi-craft-union model and mounted a coalition-based drive to effect state and city policy favorable to retail and other low-wage service workers called *Just Hours*. The most promising aspect of RAP’s occupational organizing was found to be its long-term member involvement, many of whom remain active with the organization even after changing jobs, becoming unemployed or leaving retail altogether. Such durability is a noted asset in the struggle to organize workers subjected to what I have described as the *contingent regime* of workplace control, characterized by high turnover and minimal attachment to any given firm. Significant challenges, however, exist to establishing functional occupational unionism that includes union-based hiring, skill training and certification, in the retail sector. The primary historical trend, as argued for in chapter 4, is the *deskilling* of retail work, which makes RAP’s attempt to re-skill and certify such jobs an uphill battle indeed.

Acknowledgement of these limitations by RAP’s leaders appears to have contributed to their more recent emphasis on public policy and media efforts, culminating in the *Just Hours* initiative launched in fall 2012. Though this campaign is still in its early phases at the time of writing (spring 2013), it has already succeeded in gaining broader visibility for RAP and infusing concern for the plight of contingently employed retail workers into the public debate.

Furthermore, worker-based store-front (and in-store) actions are included as a component of this campaign, providing concrete opportunities for rank-and-file worker and member involvement. The central limitation with this, as with most policy-oriented drives, is its potential to sideline workers and RAP members in the process of achieving workplace change, instead appealing to elite institutions—state and local governments, foundation funders, etc.—as the agents of transformation. To the extent such methods become predominant in RAP and similar organizations, the character of their activity can be said to shift increasingly from organizing to advocacy (Jenkins 2002), from “resourcefulness” to “resources” (Ganz 2000), or from “dialogical” to “monological” forms of action (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980), with attendant declines in the transformative nature of their goals. Such a shift is by no means complete or inevitable at RAP at present; its potential, however, exists.

The fruits of this study have been the identification of patterns of change and current dynamics within the department store retail sector, the impacts of these structures on workers’ consciousness and union receptivity and the viability of various organizing strategies for translating and developing these proclivities into tangible gains for workers. In doing so, I have attempted to bring “the study of work back to labor studies,” as Juravich and Bronfenbrenner (2005) recently proposed. More remains to be done, however. My focus was on two companies within a particular subsector (department stores) of a predominantly low-wage industry (retail). My approach was qualitative and thus small in scope in order to capture the fine-grained subtleties of service workplaces and worker consciousness. But there are myriad other firms and sectors of retail and other low-wage industries in America and elsewhere. It remains to be seen whether deskilling, team-based contingent control and the effects of these on workers’ attitudes found here also obtain in other arenas of low-wage service work. Moreover, the analysis of

occupational or non-workplace modes of organizing, begun here with RAP, are only in their infancy with regard to the contemporary landscape of union revitalization efforts. The recent emergence of OUR Walmart and SEIU's Fast Food Forward campaign provide tantalizing opportunities to study and draw lessons from similar strategies pursued at the national or regional, rather than purely local level. In short, the fields of low-wage services and service worker organizing, though already approached from several angles by many capable theorists, are rich with opportunities for investigating the sources and challenges of labor movement resurgence. To this latter end, my study has hopefully made a contribution that will be of use to scholars and activists alike.

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